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# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume XV, Number 1

Winter, 1955

2014-H3021 -1-P014050

## FRANK HOLWERDA:

### Consider Poor Ansel, the Spinhead

The first time I saw these hawks, I thought they were eagles. They were that large. The tree in which they had their nest was a tall alder which really had no business being there in such high latitude in the first place. It was growing alongside the ditch that supplied water for the mine hydraulic guns and it couldn't have penetrated the permafrost, grown there and thrived, if it hadn't been for the ditch. Ditch seepage thawed the ground and the tree flourished.

So perhaps I should just blame the ditch and have an end to it. Just go back there some day if I have time and stomp that ditch full of brown-moss and spruce balls and dam it to utter and everlasting nugacity. Plug it up and let the beavers play and the otters slide and the minks snuffle around and the lynx dig out the beavers and the wolverines befoul it all and move on, and then have the cycle start over again. I have the opportunity to dam that ditch right now—I'm only across the ridge—but how about the time? Time, eh? Mere possession of a watch does not of itself provide time.

Standing there under that tall alder, I watched the parent birds fly up from the nest and then sail down toward the floor of the valley. Then one of the young ones took off after them, flapping awkwardly but going at high, seemingly-uncontrolled speed. Like a rough-feathered plummet he went. One remained in the nest, fully fledged and quivering. I should have walked on.

I jarred the trunk of the tree with the brush-hook I was carrying back to camp and when the vibrations of the blow travelled through the nest and out through the twig-tips, this young hawk still up there peeped timidly a few times, looked down and screamed in fright and then settled back in the nest, cowering.

What sensible reason did I have for cutting down that tree? I did it though. At that time there still was no spinning in spinning no spinning. I went at it with my brush-hook and after the noise of the first few blows stopped ringing and clattering in my ears, I didn't mind it so much. I certainly didn't mind the physical exertion. It made me feel good. Even while chopping away though, I wondered why I would swink so—just to catch a hawk. I'd have done the same thing to capture an owl, but to get a grouse or a ptarmigan, I wouldn't have done that much work—not even hungry I wouldn't have. There's something about catching a prey-bird that catching a seed- or bug-eater can't match.

When the tree finally came to earth, it fell softly and without the thunder I'd expected. It just bent double where I'd hacked it and came down with more of a swoosh and a muffled slam in the knee-deep moss than a crash. When the tree started to talk just before it toppled, the young hawk left his nest, gripped a branch and rode it down that way, wings half-extended as though drying them, peeping in fear all the way down.

I had quite a time catching him then. He hopped from branch to branch out of my reach and I only nailed him at last by taking off my jacket and leaping at him and smothering him down. He was an exceedingly-strong and well-developed bird and his talons were like things machined, fashioned of high-carbon steel. His beak was hooked and sharp as a fighting gaff and could have torn off a man's cheek and exposed his back teeth. There was yellow fire sparking from his eyes and his claws dug into the leather cuff of my gloves. But he made no attempt to fly away. The feathered bastard seemed to give it no thought at all.

On the trail alongside the ditch I carried him perched on my wrist; past the penstock where the ditch took to an inverted siphon and down into the valley, skidding and slipping on the rounded surface of the pipe, across the uneven tailing piles on the way to the gold camp.

A small, noisy avalanche clattered down behind me as I left the tailing pile and wound up in the middle of the gravel road leading



into camp, the hawk still clutching my wrist. It was just about there that I met the mine superintendent and we passed each other without a word as we always did. I walked another twenty feet or so and then turned around and he did the same. We always did that when we met and passed each other; we'd both turn and look back at each other but we never said a word. He was a strange, quiet man for a mine superintendent and never touched a drop. He was friendly all right but not given to loud greetings; he was reserved in the quantity of conversation he dispensed. He and I could have worked well together.

Now, I couldn't very well take that hawk into the wanigan which I shared with Old Pete. Neither Old Pete nor I could stand the constant uproar in the main bunkhouse, so we'd patched up this wanigan and moved in together. Old Pete said I was all right but he didn't want any pet squirrels or other live things in our wanigan and, as a concession, he stopped placing the felt inner-liners of his gum shoepaks on the stove to dry. We'd made that agreement and we both lived up to it. So I took the hawk to the shed where they stored the winter tools and perched him on a long ice-bit between a window and four unopened drums of ice-ban. That way he could sit by the window and look out at the tundra, or go sideways along the bit and perch in the dark over the ice-ban.

We had ribmeat for supper that night and after it was over and most of the rest of them were sitting on the outside steps tossing bits of cotton-batting from the first-aid kit into the air for the swallows to catch and use for their nests, I went in to see the cook. The cook was a bitter man who hated being a cook but that was all he could do and that not too well.

"Raw meat!" The way he said it, you'd think I'd asked for his right arm to the pit. "Just got the wrinkles out of your belly with supper and now you want raw meat!" I didn't want to tell him why I wanted it, so I just walked out but later on the flunky told me to come around to the screened larder in the back and gave me a whole gunny sack full of ribs and there still was plenty of meat between them. The fat left on was waxy and yellow.

So far, I hadn't told anyone about my hawk in the tool shed. When I came around the side of the building and walked past the steps, I minded my own business and I think they should have done the same. Why couldn't I tell them I was just packing some ribmeat to a hawk? After all, what were they doing? They were

giving first-aid cotton-batting to some flying swallows. But that's the way it always was.

My hawk was hungry all right but he couldn't understand what I was trying to do. I tore off some strips of lean meat and held them up in front of him but he just crabbed away from me on the ice-bit. I grabbed him by the shanks with my left hand and we wrestled for it. He was snake-quick with his beak and tore my right glove to shreds. His wings were strong too and he raked me across the face with them every time I got that close. He was a big hawk with a wingspread of more than three feet.

I say we wrestled for it and I finally got him down. I got him alongside one of those ice-ban drums, held his legs with my left hand, put my knees on his wings and then stuffed his mouth full with my right hand. I'd hold his beak shut until he swallowed and then stuff it full again. After a while I felt his crop and it was solid and hard and round and I knew he was fed. I set him back on his perch and saw a whitish film drop down over his eyes—he was that full and sleepy.

I couldn't see anything wrong with this hawk. So why couldn't the damn thing fly? Why didn't he say the hawk equivalent of, "To hell with this noise! Me for the woods, Boy!"

I wondered about it that night and couldn't sleep and asked Old Pete about it. He said a hawk acting like that was probably too young to fly or didn't have his flight feathers yet, but that wasn't so. I could see that. It was something else.

A little after midnight, I got up and went out there again. The sun was just coming back up over the ridge it'd dipped behind an hour or so before. It was almost daylight and hundreds of ducks were flying over low, circling and settling down on one of the old dredge ponds and quacking in the brush and willows where they had their nests. A flock of swallows swarmed around me and followed me to the tool shed, flying so close I could see their open mouths and the green sheen on their backs and feel the gust of their flying on my cheeks. Just beyond the tool shed I saw a snowshoe rabbit quailed down in the middle of the gravel road just waiting for the end, and a weasel sneaking along in one of the ruts. I threw a rock ten inches to the left of the weasel and another one ten inches to the right of the rabbit.

My hawk was perched near the window in the pasty white of the new daylight. He had his yellow eyes wide open now and glared

at me coldly, not blinking. But he was a beautiful bird nevertheless. Every brownish-grey and speckled feather had just the right amount of overlap and each one fitted smoothly. He leaned forward on his perch, his wings away from his body as though hovering. The ruff on his neck moved with his head and there was something fascinating about the way those short feathers slid over the bird-oil surface of those below.

Looking at him so closely, I suddenly saw something else. For a moment I was almost sick. On top of his head and protruding through the feathers, were two white grubs. They were bluntly-pointed and wove back and forth in slow reaches like swivel-socketed horns. I picked up a thin twig then and held the hawk's attention by speaking to him in low tones. With the twig I gently prodded the things on his head. They disappeared and as they did, the hawk blinked his eyes and faintly clicked his throat, swallowing. I stood motionless until they reappeared and then saw how fat and roundly-shiny they were. They slipped back in again at the touch of the twig.

I rummaged through my things for a pair of tweezers, knowing very well I had no such thing. And I shouldn't have leaned over so far for so long spinning spinning a gyroidal-symphony-dynamo-spinning. Then I went to the blacksmith shop and found a pair of needle-nose pliers and felt better. It was no use though. That goddamn bird and I beat each other to frazzles but I couldn't pin him down and work the pliers all at the same time. After all, how the hell many hands and fingers and other means for grasping and holding does a man have? Should I have taken off my shoes and burlap socks and tried to work with my toes too? What I needed right then and there was a tail. Not a swallow and beaver rudder-tail. And not a long-haired, fly-swattin' tail. No! A big, brown, round, five-foot, workin' tail. A prehensile one with a big bare thumb on the end. A by-god prolongation of the rear end. But all the while I knew I couldn't wait around to grow one or have one grafted.

I went back to the wanigan and roused Old Pete. Old Pete disliked being roused but he'd roused me one night the winter before and made me spend an hour and a half outside in the lung-frosting cold, looking at the aurora in the sky which happened to be an awful red that night. Old Pete kept repeating, "That's blood! That's blood!" that night. Then he tried to bury his head with his shoulder blades as though fearful it would drip down on him. So, I owed Old Pete a rousing.

He loaded his pipe and we went back together. With both of us working hard, we managed to pin the hawk down and get him in position for me to work on him with my right hand. Every time I merely touched one of those fat shiny things in his head, it would slide back in and then we'd wait. I wanted to pour something like iodine or liquid bleach into those holes and chase them out that way, but Old Pete said no that might kill them on the inside and then the hawk's head would fester or the stuff might even corrode the hawk's brains for that matter.

"I'll smoke the bastards out!" That's what Old Pete suggested and that's what we decided to do.

Old Pete tamped a fresh charge into his pipe, lit it well and then blew into the bowl, sending the smoke out of the stem like a light-blue needle. That did it. As soon as the hot smoke hit them, they pushed out their blunt ends and held them there long enough for me to grip them with the pliers. Five I pulled out that way and then the two holes were empty. Old Pete blew smoke into one hole and it came out the other so we knew they were connected and we were also reasonably certain they were empty. They could have laid some eggs in there though.

These worms were shaped like tiny, peeled bananas, off-white and half an inch long. They were incredibly active and bent in their fat middles, touching their bluntly-pointed ends together—first to the left and then to the right. In unison they did this as though to the beat of a cadence. After a while, you had to look away or you'd catch yourself trying to bend with them. Count cadence, COUNT! We left them doing their drill on top of a drum and placed the hawk back on his perch.

Then we theorized. It was this or it was that or it was something else. We settled on rabbit worms which were only eggs when the parent birds made the strike and took the meal to the nest. That's what we settled on although we both suspected that rabbit worms died if they lost their host. And as for maggots, well, maggots always waited, didn't they?

On the way out, we noticed that the top of the drum was bare and there was no sign of the worms. I searched the dirt floor and ran my hands down the side of the drum but they were gone. Old Pete laughed. "I know," he said and sucked deep on his dirty old pipe, "out in the air like this, they get dried off. The air makes them brittle. They just try and try to bend and get lumpy from

straining and when they finally make it, they go 'snap' and spin away." We walked back to the wanigan. "Might be catchy," Old Pete said, looked at me sharply, snugged his head deep between shoulders. He took a complete bath then, using brown laundry soap, lathering it well and not rinsing too thoroughly. I smelled it every night for a long time.

Day by day after that, my hawk picked up. Holes healed. After the first few times, he knew when I came to feed him. I had to throw the ribs into the old dredge pond after a few days but the flunky arranged to let me have more whenever I asked. This was in exchange for my not calling him "flunky" when I wanted more coffee in the mess hall but calling him "waiter" instead. The cook woke him up at four every morning by hammering on his door with a crab-shaker's mallet.

About two weeks passed before I took my hawk outside. By this time he was quite tame and would sit on my left wrist as I fed him. I took him out into the bright sunlight, extended my arm and spun around and around, snapping him off my wrist when I had reached maximum momentum. He went through the air as though trussed, turning end over end, feathers ruffled and, obedient to the inexorable law of gravity, came down, landing in a willow-clump—ignominiously, screaming in astonishment. From then on, I took it easy. I pushed him off my wrist gently, permitting him to jump to the ground. After we'd practiced this a few times, he spread his wings wider and wider until at last he learned to sail. Then came the evening I tossed him to the roof of the tool shed and coaxed him to fly down for his food. Farther and farther he flew now and learned to circle and wheel. But always he returned to my outstretched wrist.

No one else around there liked hawks. Hawks? Jesusman! Hawks killed and lived on grouse and ptarmigan chicks and young pintails and gadwalls; they killed rabbits and red squirrels and thus caused a shortage of food for fur-bearing animals such as foxes and mink; they upset lemming cycles; they spread disease; they waylaid and murdered men lost on the vast stretches of barren tundra; they set fire to lonely trappers' cabins in the dead of arctic night. Hawks!

I should have known better but I didn't. It was raining the morning I decided to have my hawk spend the day on the roof of the tool shed. I thought the weather might help toughen him. When I returned that night, the air had cleared, it was a beautiful, soft evening and everyone was out throwing rocks. This hawk of mine

flew from roof to roof of all the shacks around there and each time he landed, a barrage of coarse gravel spattered around him. I was furious. I blew my stack into space. I stormed and blasphemed and also threw rocks and my aim was deadly. They thunked when they landed where I'd aimed. I was an efficient rocker that night, spinning and spinning. I threw them by the handful and singly, flat smoking trajectory and corkscrew curves that hopped before landing. And long after they had all gone inside, I still threw rocks. I threw them against the shack walls and the barn doors and bounced them off the white sign with the black arrow on it and the words underneath: "Mining Office."

Then I coaxed my hawk down and placed him on his perch on the ice-bit inside the winter-tool shed and knew it was now time to decide what to do.

The next night I carried him several miles back into one of the hydraulically-cut canyons, high with the putrescence of thawed mammoth flesh. There I threw him into the air and watched with pride and some satisfaction as he wheeled gracefully and then flew straight up the canyon. Straight he flew, his wings beating strong and steady until he was lost to my sight.

No one spoke to me about my hawk, not even Old Pete. If any of them knew what I'd done with him, they never mentioned it in my presence. I was somewhat shocked then one morning at breakfast a month later. One of them who sat across the table from me said to the one next to him, "That hawk with the allegahzoompatz worms in his head'll be back soon." He said it loud enough for all of them to hear and they all stopped eating for a few seconds. Just sat there and stirred their coffee and reached for things but didn't eat.

"Yeah?" the other one said, as though such information utterly astounded him. He was overwhelmed. "I hadn't heard about it!" He arched his eyebrows until they almost touched his hairline. "What's he doin', flyin' back for his supper?"

"Flyin'? Hell! That thing can't fly! He's walkin' back. Guys on the night shift saw 'im walkin' back across the point field. Walkin' along through three inches of water."

"Could be he's a duck hawk?" Loud, loud. Too loud for conversation.

"Nah! He was walkin', not paddlin'. Had his head down and leanin' into the wind; soppin' wet with his goop draggin' behind him. Wants his worms back, I guess. Wants to ask his daddy for his worms back. Hah!"

"His daddy wants him too. Lonesome! Wants to tell his hawk-boy somethin'—in hawk language yet!"

"Hawk-boy, you say?" Louder now and open-mouthed; loud to the point of spittle spraying. "I'll bet it's a hawk-girl! Just an ornery, egg-layin' bird-bitch! Just a . . ."

Should I fight? Should I rise and cock back a stiff left for a hook? Knock their heads through their respective ani?

They all went back to eating again, rattling their cups and calling the flunky. They said, "Pass the blank sirup" and "Pass the blank bread" or "Pass the blanking paper" when they wanted the can of folded napkins. Everything had to be adjectivized with that one word.

Even if they were discussing merely the weather, just the sound of their voices disturbed me. I hated the way they had to clip their words and flip them from the corners of their mouths like grape seeds. At times, the most grating vibratory disturbance is that of the human voice.

I remember it well. After my cereal, I had a helping of fried potatoes and three pork chops but only one cup of coffee and then put my orange into my pocket for later. I went to work that morning but can't recall being productive. I picked a coffee can full of blueberries for lunch and then when it got time to knock off for the day, misjudged the hour. The truck was gone when I walked down the draw to where they had it parked, so I had to walk back to camp again that day.

It was late as I came up the gravel road into camp and I knew the cook would rather cut out his own heart, hash it with a dull knife, fry it in his own fat and scrape it off a skillet into that barrel by the sink, than feed me after hours. I headed for our wanigan and then saw them all sitting on the steps of the mess hall again—everyone with his big, shiny, washed, bare face pointed in my direction. I came abreast the winter-tool shed and saw him from the corner of my eye. He was perched on the end of a sawhorse at the side of the shed where they tossed the empty nail kegs. He was wet and bedraggled, perched hunched over.

Four times I tried to leave the wanigan that night but every time I stepped through the door, I saw them still sitting on the steps, smoking and batting ossmossquitoss. I waited till dark and they had all gone inside but then it was too late. I could not locate my hawk. He was not on the sawhorse where I'd seen him, nor was he on any of the roof ridges.

It was late in the season now and I had to wait longer for daylight. When it finally came, I prowled around and at last looked into one of the nail kegs directly beneath the sawhorse. There he was. He was stuffed down in there with his feet just clearing the lip of the keg. Pitched in there headfirst. Jammed tight. His claws were curled up in round, tight fists. I pulled him out by the shanks but he was stiff and rigid. As I lifted him up to the level of my eyes, something dropped. At first I thought it was an egg but then I saw that it was not. It was dead-white, blunt, and almost the size of my thumb. There was only one and what happened to it, I do not know.

I took my hawk then and a cutter-mattock and paced off about forty yards into the brush. There I peeled back a strip of brown-moss and laid him on the permafrost, replaced the moss and trod it down. And I stomped to a sudden quick cadence.

It was still very early in the morning and Old Pete woke up while I was packing my grip. I told him all about it but he didn't think there was anything too unusual about it.

"Came on a dead moose once," Old Pete said, "had his head full of those things. Peeled cucumbers. Had to cut them out. Got so big they couldn't get out of their breathing holes anymore." He ran a cold eye over everything I packed in my grip. When I clicked it shut, he reached for his socks and started pulling them on, gripping his ankle as though his foot were trying to escape. "Guess there's really no limit to the size they can grow," he said. "Just depends on what they're in. Just depends." Old Pete could be pensive at times. "I'd like to get me a real big one sometime and cut it open. See what one'd be like inside. Look Anse, you think they'd be solid white like that all the way through?"

All of them were unbearable at breakfast that morning, laughing though no one was telling stale jokes. When it was over, the flunky gave me a sandwich wrapped in wax paper and two left-over, hard-boiled eggs and I went to the Mining Office for my time. The time-keeper said he was sorry to see me go because I always worked regular hours and my sheet was so easy to fill out.

Then I walked out of the yard and down the gravel road. I was in the right-hand rut going around Pritchard's Bend when I met the mine superintendent walking toward me in the left-hand rut and he said, "Good-bye, Mr. Ansel." He said it pleasantly but that's all he said and that was the first time he'd ever spoken to me. I had a



bearing on the horizon and didn't take my eye off and didn't turn around this time although I know he did because I heard the crunching in the gravel behind me stop. It was some time before I heard it start up again.

Later that same day I bought all the things I thought I'd need, nasturizing all the menobinations equiponderantly. I bought too much. The weight of the pack was greater than I anticipated. My legs never gave out on me like that before. And the spinning the spinning, the cadence I beat. It was an excruciating grind getting all the way out here but I'm glad I stayed with it. It is very quiet.

I can't say that there is much pain. Just numbness and a galloping loss of ambulatory power—as though my legs are no longer a part of me. If I should accidentally gash one with my kindling axe, I doubt if it would hurt. But I do not chop much kindling. I am conserving my strength and when I am well again, I want to walk back someday and say "Good-bye" to that mine superintendent.

There's a high ridge to the north where I've never been and that too is on my list. Therefore I keep my exertions to a minimum and my chores simple. Every third day I manage a canvas bucket of water from the creek and make it last. I don't shave anymore nor primp too much for just myself. I don't comb my hair either—the teeth seem to get caught. And, for the time being, I have given up my habit of throwing rocks. My aim is gone and furthermore when I stoop down, my head begins to sway from side to side and even holding it with both my hands does not stop it immediately.

## J. S. ATHERTON:

### Finnegans Wake: "The Gist of the Pantomime"

Joyce set out to create for *Finnegans Wake* a new language. A language with so broad a spectrum of meaning that every word would involve all creation. Every word was pondered over; all its component parts were considered. Even the letters of the alphabet, "simple as a b c," have a history going back, as Joyce reminds us, "semper as oxhousehumper" (107/34),<sup>1</sup> through the generations to the Hebrew letters *aleph*, ox, *beth*, house, and *gimel*, camel. And just as God created the universe from "atoms and ifs" (455/16), so Joyce set out to create an image, a model, a microcosm of the universe as he saw it, in all its indeterminate complexity, although built not out of atoms but of letters.

There have been few writers who have had more control over their material than Joyce.<sup>2</sup> That the final result of the labor of seventeen years should be a bewildering chaos is precisely what he intended. This, he is telling us, is what the world is like. *Finnegans Wake* presents Joyce's *weltanschauung*: his final verdict on creation; and one conclusion is that it's a pantomime.

The word *pantomime* has several meanings. As might be expected Joyce uses all of them and suggests some new ones of his own. *Pantomimus* was the name given to a form of dramatic entertainment popular in imperial Rome in which one actor played all the parts. The title could be applied in this sense to *Finnegans Wake* where all the action takes place in the mind of one sleeping character, "that was everywans in turruns" (557/9). Indeed the first mention of pantomime in *Finnegans Wake* (32/11) is followed by a passage telling us that "Here Comes Everybody" is the nickname of H.C.E., and then by a description of a scene in a theatre. Pantomime also means an entertainment given in dumbshow. This mean-

<sup>1</sup> Figures in parentheses refer to the page and line on which a quotation starts in *Finnegans Wake*, Faber, London, 1939.

There are many other references to the alphabet, e.g., "allaphbed" (18/18), "all-forabit" (19/2), and on pp. 167, 250, 492, 553, etc.

<sup>2</sup> "And at the end of it all, it must have seemed to him that he held English . . . in the hollow of his hand, for the English language too came at his call to do his bidding." John Eglinton, *Irish Literary Portraits*, London, 1935, p. 145.

ing is also applicable to *Finnegans Wake*, for although Joyce is occupied to an unparalleled extent with the exploitation of language the basic topic of his book is essentially mute. It is the silent city at night beside the flowing water of the Liffey. Writing of the third book, "The Four Watches of Shaun," Joyce told Miss Weaver that "in reality it is only a barrel rolling down the Liffey."<sup>3</sup> Joyce's original plan for this book is on the first page of one<sup>4</sup> of the notebooks included among the manuscripts presented by Miss Weaver to the British Museum. It begins: "Driftwood on Δ. Trunkles. Contredanse." Δ is Joyce's sign for A.L.P., the Liffey. The note, and the early versions, seem to show that all the action of this chapter is based on the movement of flotsam on the surface of the Liffey.<sup>5</sup> It seems likely that every other incident and every other character in *Finnegans Wake* has a similar voiceless basis. Until Joyce "lifts the lifewand and the dumb speak" (195/5) even his gossiping washerwomen are only a tree and a stone on opposite banks of the river. So, since the characters are mute, it is in a way fitting to describe the entertainment as a pantomime. These first two meanings of the word: one man who is all characters and characters who are all mute, can be seen in one phrase Joyce wrote of himself and his book: "self exiled in upon his ego . . . writing the mystery of himsel in furniture" (184/6).

But for Joyce, as for anyone who spent his childhood in the British Isles, the word *pantomime* means first and foremost the annual Christmas performance at the theatre. It is a peculiarly English form of entertainment and attempts to export it have only been successful when, like George L. Fox's American pantomime of Humpty Dumpty<sup>6</sup> and the performances at the *Théâtre des Funambules* in Paris, it was changed into something quite unlike the British pantomime. Even in England it is accepted as being ridiculous; and as a colloquial expression "It's a pantomime!" means that the whole thing is absurd, that the organization—if there ever was any—has broken down so that nobody really knows what is happening, but

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Add. MS. 47489. Extract from a letter dated May 24, 1924.

<sup>4</sup> Add. MS. 47482 A.

<sup>5</sup> The only living character, the "I" of the early versions and the "we" of *Finnegans Wake*, appears to be a donkey! For this idea, and for the suggestion that this article should be written, I am indebted to Adaline Glasheen.

<sup>6</sup> Allusions to this may be hidden among the hundreds of mentions of Fox and Humpty Dumpty in *Finnegans Wake*, but both words have many other implications, e.g., "Mr. Fox" was Parnell's alias; Brer Fox, Reynard the Fox, the German *fuchs*, are all brought in, and Fox-Davies's book on civic heraldry was used by Joyce.

the situation as a whole is amusing. Joyce was aware of the defects of his own methods and certainly had this colloquial meaning in mind when he called his work a "pantomime" (587/8) and a "punnermine" (519/3). In the phrase "the gist of the pantomime" (599/36) he is extending it further and describing the whole course of history "in this drury world of ours" (600/2) as a pantomime in this sense.

The plot of a British pantomime is based on a children's story or nursery rhyme, but the plot is practically lost sight of beneath a confusion of comic business, music hall turns, dances, popular songs and topical gags.<sup>7</sup> The method of composition Joyce employed for *Finnegans Wake* has much in common with what must be the way of writing the script of a pantomime. He began by writing down a simple story—often a childishly simple story—on the right-hand pages of a notebook. And, as can be seen from a brief inspection of the notebooks now preserved in the British Museum, he then added all kinds of material between the lines and on the left-hand pages. He then copied the whole thing out, with all the additions, onto the next empty right-hand pages and crossed the first version out in colored crayon. A fresh set of additions was then made and treated in the same way, and this process was repeated perhaps three or four times before a fair copy in ink was made and again revised and augmented. Typescripts which followed were treated in the same way, and even the early printed versions were added to again and again, so that finally the original story was even more completely buried under an accumulation of detail than is the plot of an English pantomime under the variety of extraneous entertainment. Joyce's additions were in some ways very like the material the pantomime composer uses. He put in puns, riddles, rhymes, songs, dances,<sup>8</sup> and cross-talk comedian acts such as those by Jute and Mutt on pp. 16-18 and Muta and Juva on pp. 609-610. Allusions to pantomime began to be inserted about 1925, and it was probably about that time that he decided he was writing a sort of pantomime himself.

An example of Joyce's early versions may be given from the last

<sup>7</sup> Bloom was "prevented . . . from completing a topical song . . . commissioned by Michael Gunn, lessee of the Gaiety Theatre . . . South King Street . . . to be introduced into . . . the grand annual Christmas pantomime *Sinbad the Sailor* . . ." *Ulysses*, Bodley Head, 1941, p. 639.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, "the tabarine tamtamers of the whirligigmagees. Beats that cachucha flat" (27/20), the polka (236/16); and I am indebted to Mr. M. J. C. Hodgart for pointing out that Toulouse-Lautrec and his models perform a cancan at the "flea pantamine" on p. 531.

book of the *Wake*, in which there were fewest additions. I have chosen the passage about St. Kevin which the authors of *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* describe as "one of the most charming in the book."<sup>9</sup> The first version of this<sup>10</sup> is written in pencil in a large hand lengthways down a double sheet of unruled foolscap. A wide margin has been left on the left-hand side down which numbers have been written. Some of the numbers have been altered during the process of composition but are easily distinguished. The manuscript runs:

- 1 Kevin born on the island of Ireland
- [2]\* in the Irish ocean goes to Lough
- 2 Glendalough, where pious Kevin
- 3 lives alone on an isle in the
- 4 lake on which isle is a pond
- 5 in which is an islet whereon  
holy Kevin builds a beehive hut  
the floor of which most holy  
Kevin excavates to a depth of  
one foot after which done  
venerable Kevin goes to the  
lakeside and fills time after time
- 6 a tub with water which  
time after time most venerable  
Kevin empties into the cavity in  
his hut thereof creating a pool  
having done which blessed Kevin  
half fills the tub once with  
water which tub then most
- 7 blessed Kevin sets in the centre  
of the pool after which
- 8 Saint Kevin fixes up his  
frock to his loins and seats  
himself blessed S. Kevin in  
his hiptubbath where as the
- 9 ardour Doctor . . .

\*In the MS this numeral, without brackets, has a transverse line through it.

If the marginal numbers are compared with the text it will be seen that Joyce is making a series of concentric circles on land and water: 1. Ireland; 2. lake; 3. island; 4. pond; 5. islet; 6. flooded cavity; 7. bath tub; 8. water in tub; 9. Kevin. Originally the series seems

<sup>9</sup> *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, J. Campbell and H. M. Robinson, Faber, London, 1947, p. 282, note 2, carried over to p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> Add. MS. 47488 f. 24. I am indebted to Miss Weaver, the owner of the copyright, for permission to publish this extract. She remembers typing it out for Joyce in 1923.

to have been ten (counting the Irish Sea as the first) but nine is a more canonical number. Joyce then filled in the passage with various sets of sevens chosen to match the character of St. Kevin. I am indebted to Mr. M. J. C. Hodgart for a note that "The texture has been thickened by the addition of seven of the canonical hours, seven of the nine orders of angels, the seven orders of Holy Order, seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, seven sacraments . . ." But most readers will agree that the initial fable is somewhat childish; indeed, similar situations are described in many tales for children. Joyce is embroidering upon the fabric of a story for children just as the pantomime writers do.

The pantomimes Joyce saw as a child must have been those presented at the Gaiety Theatre, South King Street, Dublin, a theatre mentioned several times both in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. It is probably because he was taken there for treats as a child that he calls the King Street theatre the "king's treat house" (32/26). The lessees and managers of the theatre were the Gunn family, particularly Michael Gunn, whose name appears in *Ulysses*<sup>11</sup> and is mutated a dozen different ways in *Finnegans Wake*. "The Gunn family occupied a prominent place in Dublin"<sup>12</sup> and Joyce compares them, as theatre managers and producers, with the Creator of the universe. "Gun, the farther" (481/19), Mr. Michael Gunn, becomes H.C.E. as "Mr. Makeall Gone" (220/24). They control both the "Gods"—or gallery—and the pit in the theatre. By a switch which is elementary in *Finnegans Wake* this makes them lords of Heaven and Hell. Joyce professes to envy their opportunities: "were I our pantocreator would theirs be tights for the gods" (551/7). When Shaun wishes to take a solemn oath he says, "And I . . . truthfully declaret before my Geity's Pantokreator . . ." (411/14). In both cases there is a pun on two possible meanings of "pantocreator": the producer of a pantomime, and the All-creator from the Greek prefix *panto*: all. Shaun's oath also provides an example of Joyce's care for every letter. There is a pun on the Dublin Gaiety and the Greek word *ge*: earth. The spelling of the following word is altered from *pantocreator* to *Pantokreator* to underline the Greek pun and bring in the Byzantine concept of God the Son as all-Creator. There are so many other allusions to the Gunns that it may be said that the word *gun* in *Finnegans Wake* almost always refers to them rather than to a weapon. For example:

<sup>11</sup> See note 7 above.

<sup>12</sup> St. John Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time*, London, 1933, p. 50.

"Guns. And it was written up in big capital. Guns" (368/3), is partly telling us how the Gunns had their name outside their theatre. The word *gunnfodder* (242/10) carries as its first significance not "cannonfodder" but gossip, because there were so many topical allusions in the Gunns' pantomimes that all the gossip in Dublin was food for them.

British pantomimes in the early nineteenth century opened with a fable which was suddenly altered by a transformation scene into a harlequinade. But owing to the success of a series of famous clowns, beginning with Grimaldi (55/35) and going on to Whimsical Walker, who did not die till 1934, the clowning became more and more important until the harlequinade was either omitted or restricted to one short scene at the end. "Only Walker himself is like Waltzer, whimsicalissimo they go murmurand" (473/3) sounds like a description of this displacement of dancers by clowns. But Dublin pantomimes in the 1890's still included a harlequinade as a final spectacle, so Joyce includes one in *Finnegans Wake*. Harlequin and Columbine are occasionally mentioned in such phrases as "let harleqwind play peeptomine up all our colombinations" (360/36). "*Gallop Trotter and Hurleyquinn*" (48/15) is the second part of Joyce's title for a pantomime he promises us which turns out to be "*The Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies*" (219/18), a section in which many aspects of pantomime in *Finnegans Wake* are seen most clearly.

This section opens with four pages parodying a theatre programme and possibly based on an actual Dublin Gaiety Theatre programme. It begins with a Joycean version of the customary announcements of times of performance, admission charges, names of distinguished patrons, and mention of the first London performance. Then comes a list of the actors, who are the main characters of the *Wake*, suitably modified. The usual acknowledgments to the purveyors of theatrical properties include "Dances arranged by Harley Quinn and Coolimbeina" (221/25), and "Jests, jokes, jigs and jorums for the Wake." Such programmes often contained a summary of the plot headed "Argument." Joyce makes a wilful abuse of the word with "An argument follows." Finally we are told that the performance is "to be wound up . . . by a Magnificent Transformation Scene showing the Radium Wedding of Neid and Moorning and the Dawn of Peace, Pure, Perfect and Perpetual, Waking the Weary of the World" (222/16).

The transformation scene is one of the main ingredients of panto-

mime and one of the reasons for its appearance in *Finnegans Wake*. The device was most popular during the middle of the nineteenth century. Henry Morley in *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, published in 1881, describes performances in the 1860's in which every scene was transformed: kitchens into ballrooms, streets into enchanted islands, shops into magicians' caves; and all the costumes of the actors were simultaneously altered to match their new surroundings. Later it became customary to confine the transformation to the final scene. Usually the set became a ballroom with a magnificent staircase down which the actors made their final entrances in costumes as magnificent as the resources of the company would allow. In *Finnegans Wake* the transformation scene is dawn, the wedding of night and morning that was promised on page 222, and comes, according to convention, in the final scene. This begins on page 615 with a letter from A.L.P. to God—"Dear . . . Reverend . . . Majesty"—justifying the actions of her husband, H.C.E. What follows is at one and the same time a transformation scene and the dying speech of the river as it flows into the sea as night becomes morning: transformations both.

To show that this is a transformation scene, Joyce wove the titles of all the usual pantomimes into the text. That "goldylocks" (615/23) and Jack and the Beanstalk ("jerk of a beamstark"—/25) are pantomimes and not simply the nursery tales is shown by the word "pulltomine" (—/24) which comes between them. Fairygodmothers (617/18) and Bluebeard (—/21) "we may add to this stage" (619/9) with the word *stage* reinforcing the theatrical overtones and suggesting that even Humpty Dumpty in this section (619/8; 628/11) is the pantomime rather than the Lewis Carroll character.

Then the actual transformation takes place. It is a tenderly beautiful passage, although tenderness is not a usual characteristic of Joyce's writing. "Soft morning, city! Lsp! I am leafy speafing. Lpfl Foly and folty all the nights have falled on to long my hair" (619/20). Liffey is flowing out to sea as night becomes morning: the old lady, Anna Livia, is dying. Her dress, magnificent as nature's resources will allow, is made out of the leaves that fall upon her surface. She is "exquisitely pleased about the loveleavest dress" (624/21). "The woods are fond always," says Liffey. "As were we their babes in. And robins in crews so." We are being reminded of the scene in the pantomime *Babes in the Wood* when the two sleeping children are covered with leaves by friendly robins. Another pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe*, has also been woven in, and others follow: Old



King Cole, Sinbad the Sailor, Sleeping Beauty, Aladdin, Snow White, Goody Two Shoes, Puss in Boots, Ali Baba, and Little Red Riding Hood.<sup>13</sup> "The beardwig I found in your Clarksome bag (625/2) contributes to the stage atmosphere with its reminder of Willie Clarkson, the greatest of all theatrical wigmakers and a master of "makeup" (625/5). A.L.P. was "A princeable girl" (626/27), she says. The Principal Girl is the title given to the heroine of any pantomime. H.C.E. was "The pantymammy's Vulking Corsergoth," which sounds as if he had been the Demon King: the pantomime villain.

But she is leaving him. We have reached the end of the *Wake*. The magic is fading. Soon everything will be revealed by daylight in its ordinary shape. The washerwomen will be stone and tree; H.C.E. a collection of houses; A.L.P. a moving water. So in the pantomime of Cinderella when the clock strikes twelve . . . The image is hardly apparent even after many readings of Joyce's final passage, but once observed it adds greatly to the total effect. The carriage becomes a mere pumpkin: "I thought you were all glittering with the noblest of carriage. You're only a bumpkin. I thought you the great in all things, in guilt and in glory. You're but a puny. Homel" (627/22). She is going—along with her sisters, the rivers of the world—to meet the father of waters.

But the great curve of *Finnegans Wake* sweeps us round again, back to where we started, in accordance with the cyclic theory of history that Joyce adopted from Vico. Yet as the cycle of great events swings round, small things endure and rest unchanged. So we are told in a sentence by Edgar Quinet which Joyce admired so much that he quotes it once in its elegant French original (281/4) and twice parodies it at full length (14/35; 236/19). Quinet chose wild flowers as examples of the things that endure; the weeds that grew unnoticed beneath the walls of Troy still flower above Troy's ruins. In *Finnegans Wake* "the wild flowers are the lirts of children."<sup>14</sup> In this connection it is interesting to recall an idea of Isaac D'Israeli: "Many of the games of our children were played by Roman boys; the mountebanks, with the dancers and tumblers on their movable stages, still in our fairs, are Roman. . . . Among these Roman diver-

<sup>13</sup> These occur at the following places: 619/26, 620/7, 620/36, 621/5, 622/2, 10, 11, 23, 28.

<sup>14</sup> From a letter to Miss Weaver, Nov. 1930, published in *Envoy*, Dublin, V. 17. Slocum and Cahoon in their *Bibliography of James Joyce*, London, 1953, date this issue correctly as April, 1951, but some copies, presumably for the American market since the price is stated as "60 cents," are dated May, 1951.

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sions certain comic characters have been transmitted to us. . . . The speaking pantomimes . . . are from this ancient source."<sup>18</sup>

Joyce had certainly read *Curiosities of Literature* and his second parody of the Quinet sentence succeeds in recalling the D'Israeli passage as well. He begins, "Since the days of Roamaloose and Rehmosé . . .," putting D'Israeli's "Roman boys" in place of Quinet's "Pline et . . . Columelle." In the rest of the passage he is listing dances as things that endure: pavaues, waltzes, reels, rigadoons, down to ragtime and the cancan. But the idea that pantomime could be used to exemplify the returning cycle of events would occur to Joyce without any literary prompting. It approaches the image Joyce uses of the world as a stage for a "stock company" (510/17) in which all the heroes are played by the leading man, all the heroines by the leading lady. Who played Othello plays Hamlet, Desdemona becomes Ophelia, and so on as each actor performs the part allotted to him by "the producer (Mr. John Baptiser Vickar)" (255/27) or "the compositor of the farce of dustiny" (162/2). When the play is over they are "carried off the set and brought home to be well soaped, sponged and scrubbed again" (220/16). Even when the human actor dies the play will still go on as "like the newcasters in their old plyable" (388/7) new casts take over old plays, giving Joyce one more level to his parable, one more reflection of the image of his thought in the perspective to infinity between the parallel mirrors of his technique, as "new garrickson's" (55/35), new sons of Garrick, renew the garrison.

With pantomime this is still more obvious. Every Christmas the pantomime returns to the British stage and parents take their children to see shows to which they themselves were taken as children by their own parents. "Here we are again" is the traditional introductory remark of clowns. Joyce is obviously comparing the world to a pantomime when he writes: "Ah, sure, pleasantries aside, in the tail of the cow what a humpty daum earth looks our miseryme heretoday as compared beside the Hereweareagain Gaieties of the Afterpiece when the Royal Revolver of these real globoes lets regally fire of his *mio colpo* for the chrisman's pandemon to give over and the Harlequinade to begin properly SPQueaRking Mark Time's Finist Joke. Putting Allspace in a Notshall" (455/23). The world as we know it, "our miseryme heretoday," is "a humpty daum earth," we are told, and "humpty daum" combines Humpty Dumpty with a German version of Tom Thumb to suggest something that is small and fallen

<sup>18</sup> Isaac D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature*, "The Pantomimical Characters."

but is also a pantomime. "Chrisman's pandemon" is another bilingual pun. The obvious suggestion is Christmas pantomime, the word *pandemon* is Greek for "belonging to all the people," and Joyce was probably thinking also of "pandemonium," and possibly of the Hall of the Devils in *Paradise Lost*. The pantomime of human life, Joyce is saying, will be transformed at the last day into the harlequinade of heaven. The Joycean tangle of jokes and puns that ends the passage seems to have little to do with pantomime<sup>16</sup> unless it is intended as an example of pantomime's contents. But the capitalization of the word *Gaieties* shows that Joyce is still thinking of the pantomime as taking place at the Dublin theatre.

The Gaiety is mentioned again when Joyce writes of another pantomime: the "Christmas pantaloona, *Oropos Roxy and Pantharhea* at the Gaiety" (513/21), the title of which provides the best example I know of Joyce's ability to cram every aspect of creation into a single phrase. At a first glance *Oropos Roxy* suggests Oedipus Rex, and *Pantharhea* recalls the maxim of Heraclitus, *panta rhei*: everything flows. So the title seems to suggest an unending series of battles between fathers and sons, and sons and mothers. But *panta rhei* also suggests a river, and looking backwards from there we find that *Oropos* reversed gives us *soporo*, a transitive verb in classical Latin that in the Latin of the Fathers means simply "I sleep." Taken with the suggestions of rocks in *Roxy* the words then give us a picture of the sleeping mountain and the flowing river. *Pantharhea* recalls the panther that disturbed the Englishman's sleep in *Ulysses* and the "phanthares" (565/19) that disturbed the sleeping child in *Finnegans Wake*. The Hill of Howth and Dublin are sleeping but their sleep is troubled with dreams. Another city, besides Dublin, is hidden in the phrase. *Oropos*, or *Oropus*,<sup>17</sup> in Boeotia was the center of the cult of Amphiaras, who, being betrayed by his wife, enjoined his son to kill her—which he did. But Amphiaras was smitten by the divine thunderbolt<sup>18</sup> and buried in a cleft in the rocks (*Roxy*). To parallel this interpretation of *Oropos* the word *Pantharhea* is probably

<sup>16</sup> It is, however, connected with the stage since there is a double reference to Hamlet, and "globes" recalls the Globe Theatre. "SPQueaRking" shows us how, "the sheeted dead (S.P.Q.R.) Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets." The apposition of space and a nutshell recalls Hamlet's remark about being "bounded in a nutshell," as well as Nut: the Egyptian Goddess of Space.

<sup>17</sup> There was a famous theatre there.

<sup>18</sup> Thunder is one of the important themes in *Finnegans Wake* and has been mentioned by many writers. We are also told that Joyce disliked it and "a clap of thunder would send him cowering into a windowless closet." Herbert Gorman, *James Joyce*, p. 121.

meant as a combination of Panthera and Rhea. Panthera, according to an ancient Jewish myth,<sup>19</sup> was a Roman centurion who was the father of Christ. Joyce may have found the story for himself, but it is more probable that he took it from Thomas Hardy's poem "Panthera" in *Time's Laughing Stocks*. Hardy gives his own twist to the situation by bringing Panthera back to be the centurion in charge at the crucifixion, and it is probably this version that Joyce is hoping his readers will recall. His own "Christmas pantaloona" has another twist, for the spelling must have been intended to bring in the name *Rhea*. There were two mythical women of this name. One was the wife of Saturn who gave him stones ("rocks" again?) to eat and so saved her son, Zeus. The other was the mother of Romulus and Remus, types of the warring sons like Joyce's Shem and Shaun. In fact, what Joyce is saying is that the pattern of history, mythology, family relationships, and *Finnegans Wake* itself, is simply a pantomime.

For over a century almost all British pantomimes have adhered to the convention that a young lady must play the part of the hero or "Principal Boy." To balance the sexes one of the male comedians is always dressed as a woman and usually plays the part of the hero's mother. When Shaun speaks of "the yella perals that all too often beset green gerils," he gives as one example "playing breeches parts . . . in flesh-coloured pantos instead of earthing down in the coal-hole trying to boil the big gun's dinner" (434/8). The "pantos" here are both pantomimes and the flesh-coloured tights worn by the actress who takes the part of Principal Boy. It will also be noticed that the word *panto* brings in another pun on "gun." The pun on "pantos" is not—in my opinion—a very good one, but Joyce makes it twice. The other time is at the end of the children's games with "You're well held now, Missy Cheekspeer, and your panto's off" (257/19). The primary meaning here is that the games are over and the child who has been play-acting is going to be spanked. We are also told that the pantomime is finished and that the part of Shakespeare, the Principal Boy, has been played—in accordance with convention—by a young lady. It is probable that all the other changes in sex in *Finnegans Wake*<sup>20</sup> fit into the same pattern.

<sup>19</sup> The earliest surviving mention of Panthera is a refutation of the Jewish story by Origen in *Contra Celsum* (Migne, *Origen*, I, 719-725). The story is repeated in the Babylonian Talmud (*Tract. Sab. ff. 67, 104*), revised in the medieval *Toldoth Jeschu*, and brought up again in the nineteenth century. See *The Jewish Life of Christ, being the Sepher Toldoth Jeschu*, translated from the Hebrew . . . ed. G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler, London, 1885.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammed and Napoleon each appears once as a woman. See my "Islam and the Koran in *Finnegans Wake*," *Comparative Literature*, Oregon, IV (1954), p. 245.

Even the minor details of pantomime figure in the *Wake*. Everything "from cannibal king to the property horse" (599/36) comes in somewhere or other, and it seems unlikely that Joyce was relying entirely on his memory for all this. Indeed some of the information he uses could hardly have been acquired by him from watching stage performances. One book which he certainly used is *A Playgoer's Memories* by H. G. Hibbert, published in 1920 just before Joyce started to compose the *Wake*. Hibbert was a genial gentleman who for many years edited *Era*, the English actors' paper, and had an immense fund of information about the London theatre, much of which he poured into his books. When Joyce used a book he always seemed to have hidden an acknowledgment to it somewhere in his text. His reference to H. G. Hibbert, "howldmoutherhibbert" (388/29), fits too closely to be kind. Old Mother Hubbard is, of course, a pantomime. Much of Joyce's material for the pantomime references comes from Hibbert, along with many other varied pieces of information on topics such as Sweeney Todd, Johnny MacDougal, Maria Martin, Hickory Wood, and *Cryptoconchoidsyphonostomata*, all of which appear in both *A Playgoer's Memories* and *Finnegans Wake*. The only one of these which concerns pantomime is Hickory Wood (98/35-6), who was a writer of pantomime scripts.

Joyce gave even to the words of pantomime an attention which they seldom receive and never deserve. The scripts, by authors such as Hickory Wood and H. J. Byron ("our Byron"—author of "our boys": 41/16), were full of puns and riddles—"punns and reedles" (239/35), says Joyce. They were written in loose rhymed couplets that Joyce appears to be describing when he writes of the four old men "yampling around with their old pantometer, in duckasaloppics" (386/5). "Yampling" suggests walking and the iambic foot. "Pantometer" is the kind of metre used in pantomime and also every kind of metre. "Duckasaloppics" makes the verse of these Shropshire<sup>21</sup> lads sound duck-footed and sloppy, but is it meant to be taken seriously? The pantomime, as "Yampling" suggests, is just a leg show. But there is always a serious meaning underlying Joyce's clowning and *panto meter*, taken as two Greek words, recalls the maxim of Protagoras, *anthropos metron panton*: "Man is the measure of all things."

<sup>21</sup> "Saloppics" contains *Salop*, the usual English abbreviation for Shropshire. Joyce is slyly suggesting that the metres used in A. E. Housman's *Shropshire Lad* resemble the metres used in pantomime.

The pun seems far-fetched, even for Joyce. But it is certain that an even more extraordinary one frequently recurs in *Finnegans Wake*. Pantomime may be taken as meaning "all imitation." So Joyce suggests that Plato's theories as to the nature of reality and art amount to saying that everything is a pantomime. Things as we know them are a *mimesis*: "We're umbas all" (214/7). Art is a *mimesis* of a *mimesis*: "shadows shadows multiplying" (281/18). The true reality is in the Platonic heaven: "Mere man's mime: God has jest" (486/9). Even *Finnegans Wake* is a mere dim *mimesis* of the genuine masterpiece that God reads: "Every dimmed letter in it is a copy and not a few of the silbils and wholly words I can show you in my Kingdom of Heaven" (424/32). The parallel may be absurd, indeed Joyce says that it is absurd: "My herrings! The surdity of it! Amean to say. Her bare idears, it is choochoo chucklesome" (538/18). Bare ideas are, according to Plato, the true reality. The world as we know it is at one remove from this, art is at two removes. The word *tootoological* (468/8) seems to summarise Joyce's comment.

The conclusion to be drawn from Joyce's treatment of the entire theme of pantomime appears to be that in his opinion life is meaningless, repetitive, traditional, and yet entertaining. But it must be stated that this is only one of the many conclusions which can justly be drawn from *Finnegans Wake* and the present article makes no claim to do more than explain a part of one section of one level of the book. Indeed the present state of our knowledge of it is well described in the words of Thornton Wilder,<sup>22</sup> who is one of the most distinguished of the admirers of Joyce's work: "Some day the mighty book will be accessible even to the hasty reader, its buried patterns revealed, its secrets and mystifications and teases elucidated. I shall not live to see that day; but I shall not regret being among those of the first generation for whom it was an all but impenetrable jungle. We had the excitement and fun and awe-struck wonder of first glimpsing the order in the greatness and the greatness of the order."

<sup>22</sup> In a letter to the present writer dated Jan. 28, 1954.

# E. E. CUMMINGS:

## Poem

—laughing to find  
anyone's blind  
(like me like you)  
except in snow—

a whom we make  
(of grin for smile  
whose head's his face  
with stones for eyes

for mind with none)  
boy after girl  
each brings a world  
to build our clown

—shouting to see  
what no mind knows  
a mindless he  
begins to guess

what no tongue tells  
(such as ourselves)  
begins to sing  
an only grin—

dancing to feel  
nots are their whys  
stones become eyes  
locks open keys

haven't is have  
doubt and believe  
(like me like you)  
vanish in so

—laughing to find  
 a noone's more  
 by far than you're  
 alive or i'm—

crying to lose  
 (as down someone  
 who's we ungrows)  
 a dream in the rain

## GRACE CARNOT:

### The Panther

The bars he never saw: those silver lights  
 Of steel which weighted him like lilies. In his sight  
 Were children, trees, and country paths that slid  
 Beyond him, echoing his captiveness and hiding  
 Freedom from him. Visitors saw him  
 Safely, aptly patient, and watched that slim  
 Dream of self vanish in their keeping  
 And leave the world to sun, and, later, sleeping.

His eyes burdened him. The landscape was alive  
 With faces white as dolls', each one contrived  
 To keep its curiosity like a smile  
 As he crept up and down his endless mile.  
 Each day brought him to night again, the same  
 As the day before had done—each holding its lame  
 Tomorrow like a whispering sterile beast  
 Who knows its cage grows, everywhere, unceasing.

The zoo was silent in the afternoon,  
 Except for children. They did not mind that moon  
 Of blackness stationed in its ashen tree  
 Which made it seem that night was always there.  
 He slept, thick-coiled, a python in a tree.  
 Only a god could sleep as long as he.



# JASCHA KESSLER:

## Katabolism, or, The Natural History of Love

### 1

The green giant blooms under damnation,  
 The muted ecstasies of dying realms,  
 Suppressed elegance. The hothouse roaches  
 Lope along lianas on their roach affairs.  
 Hot, hot under glass, the dour pineapple,  
 The acidless lemon, browngold and yellow,  
 Ripen without honor, athletes and esthetes.  
 The frogs squat steaming in bowers of blood,  
 And tumorous copper carp fin idly  
 At the conduit. There is nothing but life.

### 2

There is nothing but life but love. The pyre,  
 The searing mantle, the egg in embers,  
 The new pinions, a hundred years of youth,  
 Earth, air, water, the greenhouse sun at noon,  
 Is heaven in a pot, Adam virgin  
 Maundering in his sterile zoo. When she comes,  
 Swanking to his sheets, the dust lusts in the  
 Desert, and time begins society:  
 The sun runs, the moon is pregnant with stars,  
 Under domes of glass there is laughter.

### 3

Their flesh walks on tidy paths. Nimble Jack  
 And Nimble Jill, in the hothouse jungle,  
 Their fathers kings, queens were their mothers.  
 They walk, they talk. They sit, they smoke, and they  
 Kiss. Power laughs at mumblings in the bush:  
 Cities rise new in their arms, their arts conquer  
 Men: there is no other choice but to love.  
 Old closing time shoos them kindly. Outside  
 It is snowing. Their selves of laughter meet  
 Their tears. There is nothing but love but death.

## T. WEISS:

### This Narrow Stage

Asia on the one side,  
Afric on the other, and such divers  
under-kingdoms that the actor,  
coming in, must ever begin  
with telling where he is?

The first scene surely  
needs no wordy explanation:  
three Ladies strolling together  
to gather flowers, a matter of May  
summers in their hands;

each thing in its kind  
sheltered under revery's wide  
eyelids, we seem to tread the verge  
of song, the graces' ever-green,  
that time's mad rivers are

beguiled. But by and by  
and in the same place, we hear  
news of shipwreck: a distraught shape,  
the turmoil and the horror proud—  
to reach such gentle apex—

in its eye; hit by darts  
subtler than his, salty Neptune,  
rolling in storm cresting the storm  
and flung to mortality's shoal,  
drowns in its sweetness.

Can airs from Ladies,  
swelling though their skirts  
may be, and sighs from ruffled seas  
so intermingle? Yet what unities  
have we but circumstance

must grant them? Ladies  
 are persuasive; shipwrecks bear  
 their own exclusive cargo. But when  
 the one enfolds the other (fair  
 plumes and perfumes giddy

with the stir) hard put  
 indeed each player is to tell—  
 himself as well as others—where he  
 may be, the many under-kingdoms  
 wrangling for their chance

upon this narrow stage, Asia  
 on the one side, Afric on the other.

## VIRGINIA KIDD:

### In the Public Interest

Let us be catholic  
 As hell, and with the earliest intention; prolix: (hard)  
 We want our mother. Saying what sufficed for simple hurts,  
 Put votive candle to the egg, proposing little rest.  
 Not forgiveness, only lien on the maternal breast—  
 Proposing to examine what we most forget:  
 Habit's hiding skirts, the apostolic yards.

No more dumping, please.

By all sorts and throes of dying things  
 This lot has been improved. All ready love of cats is buried near;  
 Moist in state of nature mirrors brook to bound this rubble; fenced  
 To curious lookers; outbuildings' disrepair still flanks  
 The ruined manor; and luck is down to snake-eyes in the grass.  
 Spotting the die's fall is for knees and crawling; springs  
 Spat from couches intervene. And even this incautious hand plucks  
 fear

From coil and rattle; cold in the springing green antagonisms sensed  
 Whose seats are in the blood. Mattressed and lapsing chairs in ranks  
 With bedsteads cushion the old hungers; lean years by sevens in the  
 glass.

Nun's province was no clutter, and these gardens private once.  
 She must have gone away, and never warned us we would lack  
 Her services, her tidy labors in our wake, and her devotion.  
 Kneel without prayer beside bed gone so to seed; sorting remains.  
 Post God no bills.

## Before Her Life Her Eyes

Afraid? Of water—that one, who went down in foam?  
 Well, she cannot dive. But have you seen her swim? Look, is that  
 awkward,  
 Under the echoing wet? Fleet among boys? The unlaboring lung  
 Of her unsounded still—minutes go by like fish  
 Until I gasp for silly air, and envy of born ease  
 Just watching. No fear in her. . . . You trouble for her stare?  
 Always, like that, for fear of missing something:  
 Lunging, this time, with wide eyes to gain  
 The rented locker key we dive for blind  
 And deeper than a man, on the stained  
 Concrete pool-bed. See her rise, a fourth time,  
 Thrashing where she treads, beating the water, whose buoyant  
 Body better floats unaided; for her, it's sinking that is work.

Be convinced. It is the city's chlorine bloodied her eyes,  
 And makes them smart. And that old key in salvage  
 Like a pearl gives her the game; our game, the game we played.  
 Swimmers looking blind, like me, don't find the token.  
 Her scream is high for joy. You drown your joke, assuming her afraid.

And could you pull her struggling to this ground, a child to save,  
 When the oblivious guard, her self, and her companions force her  
 brave?

# REX WORTHINGTON:

## Love

"OK, let's join the bird gang," he said, his voice at twelve o'clock resonant and imperious, so that at first one was fooled. And then the gesture, at complete odds with the voice, the arms lifted mechanically to form a V, and then, as though sprung from that area of tension, his arms and outspread hands smacked sharply against his body. People looked at him—the drinkers at the bar with mute childlike surprise, and Harold, the manager of the club, lighting his cigar under his hawk nose, with ill-concealed interest, looking first at the flame of his match and next at him. He always panicked under their eyes, finding release in a mad pursuit—suddenly moving to clean all the glasses and bottles off the bar. The habitual drinkers were used to this sally and jerked their bottles right back. He retreated, dervishing awkwardly behind the bar, an object of titters now, but recovered rapidly and moved toward the cash register. Calmly he rang up one cent, put a coin in the till and turned to face them, his arms folded at ease across his chest, and his face a little arrogant, supercilious, lifted above them to stare at the opposite wall. They laughed too much or too little as though they had seen more than they wanted, and they lifted their glasses and looked into them, to ease the moment, and lit cigarettes. Sometimes a newcomer asked, "What is it? What makes him do it?" Harold said, "I don't know. Willie reminds me of a woman in heat. He's got things on his mind, you know, like he was all shut up in a barrel, just waiting to be tapped. Sometimes I have half a mind to fire him." With that he emphatically blew out a puff of smoke and began to cough, a great wheezing cough that reduced him suddenly from dignity into a veritable paroxysm, that caused the snot to flow, and still coughing he said, "All right, folks, drink 'em up. You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here," and he went onto the floor to hurry the drinkers at their tables.

Many managers had come and gone in Willie's time. He was the oldest employee, in point of faithful service, of the Arnold J. Haverman Post, No. 436, Veterans of Foreign Wars. In 1934 he had joined the Post "to take my cup from friendly hands," and he was such a sober,

mild, and unpretentious fellow on his side of the bargain, that hardly a year had passed before he was asked to accept a full-time bartender's position. "He'll be a good man," they said. "He'll take all the shit they throw at him, and never give any trouble. A steady influence, that's what we need. People are talking about us, you know, they say we're a bunch of drunkards down here." Willie had been unemployed since he made his dramatic and near-fatal departure from his farm a year and a half before. That was the day he went into the stall of gentle Bessie, who had a game leg, the vital cord of which Willie touched and was so roundly kicked that he just managed to make his way back to the barnyard where he fell unconscious. There was a store a mile away to which Mrs. Fox ran and conveyed her desperation in French for several minutes, before Mr. Stump could understand that Willie was hurt, and telephoned the hospital.

Willie was in the hospital for nearly two months, through the cold, dismal part of the winter. This undoubtedly helped him decide to leave the farm for good; for had it been spring, he might have longed for the country. Still, it wasn't a hard decision to make; Willie was a farmer's son, but hardly a farmer himself. "The stupid bastard," his father used to say, "he does everything like a damn Polack." So when Bessie scrambled up his insides, Willie wondered if God were warning him—once coming from the field at night he had been set upon by three or four wild dogs, another time he was trapped digging a well, and just last year Polford's bull, brought for the cows, pinned him to the fence like an insect before they could beat it away—and in his agony Willie made a vow with God that he would never go near a farm again, if he might live. He returned once more, however, the next spring when he was lucky enough to sell the farm. Everything went, furniture, implements . . . Bessie.

"Will she pull?"

"She's a bear."

"Nice care—I can see that."

"My best, sir," Willie said, and he pulled himself straighter on his cane, full of dignity, still offended with Bessie.

"I think you've made yourself a deal," the man said. At that Willie's lip trembled and he said, "She'll treat you as handsome as handsome does."

"I mean the farm," the man said. "Everything." Willie appeared

confused and reached impulsively for his wife's arm. The man picked up some dirt and let it slip through his fingers. When he saw them watching him, he threw the dirt down and rubbed his hands on his trousers.

There was enough to keep them for a while. Willie couldn't work yet, but his wife found a job in a bakery, making dainties. She was good at that. They were rather content; in the evenings they often went to the movies and Willie began to read. He bought a subscription to the *Reader's Digest*; the pithy sayings especially appealed to him. And he discovered poetry. "Who would've ever thought I had such stuff in me?" he said to his wife after reading a poem. "And I like it," he declared, and he went into the bathroom, closed the door, and studied his face in the mirror for a long time. Many poems he knew quite through, "Flanders Field" and "Trees," which he would recite for friends over a bottle of beer. There was no way to stop him, he had a superb voice. When he said, "Poems are made by fools like me," his friends snickered in spite of themselves and fooled with their beer bottles. "It ain't nothing he does that you can see. It's his damned face."

Willie liked the people he met in the city, he liked people about him, he joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars. And his wife took membership in the Auxiliary. It was natural enough that they should join such an organization, for they had both suffered from the war. When Willie reached the front lines in October, 1918, his path was crossed by a bullet that shot him through the groin. He fell in a hump, but rose instantly, the blood streaming through his crossed hands. He tried to smile, foolishly, but his eyes expressed terrible anguish. "Well, there go the family jewels," he said, and he fell unconscious to the ground.

When Willie was well enough to be about, the war was over. He and some other soldiers at the hospital received passes to go into Paris. At a little bistro in Montmartre they met the barmaid Genevieve. She was pretty and petite, quite French-looking, they thought, and therefore desirable. Actually she was Belgian; she had lost her home early in the war, then her father and mother, and had come to Paris. Her face was square and rather gaunt, with high cheek bones. Several strands of premature grey appeared in her naturally curly hair, and her eyes were light blue. They were dreamy and melancholy. Altogether she expressed woeful feminine sadness—as though her misery were too apparent to be all her own but rather a

friendly mask of sympathy for the soldiers, which made them itch to possess her. They did for a price and came away nonplussed. "Well, she's French all right, 'cause that's all she talked, even when I pinched her, but boy she ain't no more limber than a board, is she?" Willie ignored them; this was his first, even though he was last, and his best. He came back all the nights of his pass. When he paused for rest, after the early thrills, he became alarmed at the girl's chronic, even sorrow. He intuitively felt a need to talk down that abjectness, lest the light go out of his pleasure, perhaps never to return. "Tell me," he said in the full power of his voice, "how did a girl like you get in this awful business?" as though the expression were being uttered for the first time. She was combing her hair—that gesture. "*Comment—comment—*" he tried again, leaning toward her. Something he did made her whimper, at the corners of her eyes two sparkling tears. He went to her and put his arms around her. "Ah, my little petite," he said, feeling his manhood rage through him. Tears were running pell-mell when she lifted her face. Mandibly they clutched and fell on the bed. Genevieve became his wife, and he married her in that very country.

On the farms along Merrifield Pike, Genevieve seemed destined for scandal. "No, that's what I say, 'A real French woman from Paris.' I suppose she'll have all the boys lathering at Fox's gate like bulls. Why, an American woman won't be able to step outside the house."

"You mean she sure enough is Willie's wife?"

They went to see her. For a month of Sundays they stormed Fox's place, eating his food, dirtying up the parlor, and clapping Willie on the back, till even he could hardly smile any more. They brought her in from the kitchen for each round of visitors. "Why, she's sort of old, you know. And such a poor mournful-looking creature that I could hardly keep from laughing." The men, smiling their disappointment, withdrew as quickly as they could and went out and sat on the fence, where they told horrendously dirty stories. But a couple of hardy boys, who had remembered what their parents said at home, tried to touch her, and they were cuffed out the door. At last they went away, suddenly old and irritable, and were hard on their horses all the way home.

Genevieve and Willie had time then, to begin to know one another, and to enter into the life of the farm. A room had been furnished for them up under the eaves where they went at the blind scrabbling busi-



ness of making love as man and wife. Willie was perplexed. It was a pity how simple she was, rather like a secret box into which he could stuff his lust night after night—and as unresponsive. Willie thought of lighted Paris and the things soldiers had told him; he whispered in her ear. "Ah, you want me to be *comme ces bêtes*," she said, and for two nights she slept on a chair and wouldn't come near him. The second day he turned away from wrath and pulled the warm blankets from his mouth in order to speak. "Genevieve, this just doesn't seem right." The red morning light made him seem as rosy as a baby, and seeing the child's look of anguish on his face, she went over and got in bed with him so that he might be comforted.

On the farm Genevieve was a willing helpmeet. She milked the cows, she gathered kindling, she was underfoot in the kitchen. It was apparent to Mr. and Mrs. Fox that Genevieve hadn't brought their son up in the world one bit. "They're like one cripple leading another," Mr. Fox said.

"You'd think they were brother and sister," his wife said, astonishing herself. They viewed the young couple with alarm, and Mr. Fox set himself up as a stern lord to both of them.

Though Mr. Fox presently changed. Occasionally he helped Genevieve with tasks she couldn't master; he laughingly mocked her attempts at English and would pat her on the bottom when she came in from out of doors. His wife had fallen ill. She had always had respiratory trouble and a catarrh which sometimes made her breath unbearable. Now she was probably dying of tuberculosis.

One spring day she was seriously ill. Mr. Fox sat in their room by her bed, smelling the fetid air and looking at the sun outside. A robin came to build a nest on one of the crude cross-beams under the eaves. "There ain't no room there," Mr. Fox said aloud. But the crazy robin returned, bringing twigs and grass and laid them on the beam. Many of the twigs fell, and she knocked others off with her feet and wings when she tried to build. She came back again and again till finally her mate arrived, scolding and dancing about. He tried to push her off the beam, till they both fell and flew away. Mr. Fox rose. "By God, there's only one thing a French woman's good for," and he charged from the room. He found her in the kitchen and went straight about his business; she called for Willie. Willie, who had been working in the barn, arrived with a shovel still in his hand, and saw his father trying to drag Genevieve out from behind the kitchen stove. He hit him on the back. Mr. Fox

lifted himself, trembling, looking at odd corners of the room; but catching hold of dignity he said, "I'm your father, do you realize that?" Which took Willie back, and Mr. Fox sidled out the door.

Mr. Fox died soon after that, of a stroke, while beating a horse on the head. The news shocked his wife into a coma, but after having withdrawn from the world for a few days, she began to recover and was soon able to come out and sit on the back porch, in the sunshine. Much to Willie's relief, his mother took over the direction of the farm and, still sitting on the porch, she guided their operations the summer long. That winter she brought her husband's easy chair out into the kitchen by the range. She had a notebook and a pencil with her, and from time to time would scribble something. "There, you see," she said.

Willie said, "I don't know what I'd do without you, Mother." Her eyes were as bright and searching as bugs. Willie wondered if he could tell his mother about Genevieve—that she didn't seem to be all he had expected. Late one afternoon in February, when Genevieve was out milking the cows, he went to his mother; but, lo, she was dead, a twisted smile on her face. The farm had fallen to Willie. "Mother," he said in utter humility.

Johnny the fat man came into the bar. He was pulling at his pants. "Boy, this heat gets me down," he said. Willie put a cocktail shaker on the bar, then two bottles of beer and a jigger of whiskey. Johnny mixed them into the shaker and finished the drink in two long draughts. "I don't seem to have any room for my balls," he said. Willie got out two more bottles of beer. Johnny watched him pour the whiskey. "Every time I walk down the street I feel like I'm wrestling with somebody." This time he took a little longer with the drink. "Did you hear about that new beer distributor?"

"That Smith fellow?" Willie said.

"Yeah, Smith—seems like his name ought to be Schultz or something, don't it?" Johnny finished the drink.

"Did he die?" Willie said.

"Die—no—he's giving a stag party. Didn't you hear about it?" Willie crossed his arms and looked angry. "Nope," he said defensively.

"OK, OK, it wasn't in the papers, you know. It's for the taverns and their employees. Men. I'd go if I were you."

Willie wiped down the bar. "Free beer and food, eh?"

"And women, they tell me. Nu-ude women. Be quiet—mum's the

word, as they say." Willie picked up Johnny's cocktail shaker and wiped under it. He washed the whiskey glass and held it up to the light. "Ain't you going?" he said belligerently.

"Me, I ain't no employee. I wouldn't risk it in the summertime anyway, I'm too fat." Johnny paid for a sack of peanuts and left.

Genevieve would worry if Willie went to the stag party. They had never been very far apart. From the first days on the farm they had huddled together, instinctively, as animals do. It was not to be supposed that they liked one another or were even curious after the first few months, but against the world, they were inseparable. One time they went to a party. Everyone was young, they had applejack and some whiskey, and they played a lot of rough-and-tumble games like kids. Post office was suggested. Willie took delight in the thought of kissing another woman. The girls were outside the door and the men in. A postman stood by the door to announce the mail. "Your turn, Willie," he said. Willie went to the door and the postman opened it. Genevieve. Everyone almost died, and Genevieve and Willie stood staring at one another for the longest time, as before a mirror. At the same moment they folded in each other's arms, and fighting back their tears they gently patted one another's backs. It grew awfully quiet in the room, and the men got out the whiskey.

After Willie's parents had died, he and Genevieve went to see a doctor. They had been married four years and didn't have a child. "There's not a thing wrong with either of you," the doctor said.

"In the war I was shot down there," Willie said. "I got a Purple Heart, and I thought—"

"Nope. Nothing to it. You'll be all right. Just keep it up."

"In the same old way?"

"Why—yes," the doctor said.

That winter Genevieve became pregnant. At the top of the landing she felt dizzy. She fell downstairs and broke her arm and miscarried. She had to lie in bed to mend. When the doctor had gone, Willie broke into the bedroom, his face contorted with anger. "I just don't know what to say," he yelled. "Sometimes I get scared, dammit." She choked crying and turned toward the wall. They had no children. Afterwards, when the comrades talked about the soldiers who died, Willie went them one better. "I didn't give my life," he said. "I gave my children's lives. My children's lives." He had to repeat it. "In the war I was shot down there. I got a

Purple Heart and it did something to me." The comrades showed their respect.

"You understand that I don't have anything to complain about. I'm not grudging life. There's still me and Genevieve."

When Willie took the bartender's job, Genevieve quit work at the bakery and took her place in the home. "I'll take care of you, Curlylocks," Willie said. "You sit at home on a cushion and sew a fine seam, like a woman should."

But she was lonely without him. The neighbor women depressed her; they were always so excited, and the way they talked about their poor husbands made her blush. Willie never did any of those things—she longed for him. Late in the evenings now, when the bar was about to close, she went down to the club to wait for Willie and to walk home with him. She felt keenly his disapproval of her presence, but pretended not to notice. Sometimes on Friday or Saturday, after a busy night, she tried to help him put fresh bottles of beer into the depleted iceboxes. "Now, stop it," he said, scolding in a low tone. "Go away."

"You're awful tired, Willie. I'll just stay and help." The rest of the employees, watching them wrestle with the beer cartons, went about their work with serious faces. "God," they laughed when the Foxes had left, "they're like one cripple helping another."

When they got home Willie said, "If you do that one more time, I'll never go to work again. We'll starve like rats. I'll show you." Genevieve had never heard him talk such violence. He seemed so independent since he took the new job. She was afraid, she began to mother him. If it rained, after Willie had gone to work, she ran down to the club with rubbers and an umbrella; in the winter she lugged his galoshes and an extra sweater for him. In hot weather there were always his salt pills which he had forgotten. Willie put on weight, and lolled in bed on Sunday mornings. He thought maybe he had heart trouble, and his kidneys didn't seem the same on both sides. Once it was necessary to take two weeks off from work in order to have his hemorrhoids removed. "Aw, it was nice," he told the comrades. "Genevieve was a wife and a nurse all rolled into one. I couldn't have done better in a hospital." Then one day Genevieve slipped on the ice and broke her arm for the second time. The ladies of the Auxiliary thought it was simply amazing how concerned Willie was. "Why, I hear he turned as white as a sheet when he heard the news, and ran straight home," they told their husbands.

"I thought, gosh, I wish all men were like that." Sitting by her bed, Willie leaned back and smiled indulgently up at the ceiling. Genevieve was all right, she was sleeping. She stirred. "There, there, Genevieve, you're OK. Now don't cry. I'm not angry with you."

"Do you like me, Willie?"

"Why yes, you know. Like I read in a poem once, you and I are one."

Through the years their lives had settled down to give and take. The most they asked for was mutual kindness, and they had become zealous for each other's welfare. Genevieve waited one night for Willie to come home from work. The bar had closed, he should be along any minute now. Out in the street Genevieve heard people, boys, calling harshly and laughing. They were abusing someone. "Willie!" she thought and ran outside. At a safe distance the boys had Willie surrounded, and they were pretending to laugh as if their sides would burst. Frightened, Willie saw Genevieve and seemed to fall back against her. "Genevieve, what's the matter, what's the matter?"

"Willie, come inside."

"They're crazy, Genevieve. They're crazy."

"Oh, come away, dear," and she pulled him into the house.

"I'll get the cops," Willie said.

"Oh, darling, it's your apron." The night had been a busy one, and Willie had put his overcoat on over his apron and walked home. She took it off and threw it on the floor. Then they sought each other's arms. Their hearts grew quiet at last, the world was outside.

Willie never forgot that incident. Whenever he wanted to intensify a particular affront, he could call it up at will, sucking at it like a sore tooth. He looked around at the persons in the club—Jasper Williams abusing the slot machines and cursing, Billy Hokes the waiter and Jonesy, Connie the Sailor and Roy Hayes arguing over their beer—probably every last one of them knew about the party and hadn't told him. Willie was furious; he thought of other insults, real and fancied. Many years ago they had elected him chaplain of the Post, and then the next year and the next till finally it became automatic, and he was given the office each year without even a preliminary nomination. They told him it was because he had such a wonderful voice, and a flair for words; and sometimes when he spoke about a recently deceased comrade, their hair bristled on their

necks. When they elected him each term, they rose, smiling, and gave him an ovation, but out of the corner of his eye Willie saw them belabor each other with their elbows. And those damned Auxiliary women. They had told Willie how much they liked his wife's hair, that they just loved to look at it. Genevieve's hair had turned completely grey, silver in appearance, but it still retained its natural curl. She had it done up in ringlets so that she would only have to run her comb through it in the morning; life was easier that way. Willie knew that the women lied. They were as appalled as he was and only spoke because they just had to say something. He knew what poor Genevieve looked like, she looked like ornamented death. Willie grabbed for a rag and wiped down the bar. Harold the manager came in; Willie met him in the middle of the floor. "Why didn't you tell me about that damned stag party?" he said.

"Well, Willie—"

"I'm just as responsible as you are."

"Now, listen, Willie—" Willie left him and went behind the bar. "You—Jasper Williams—get away from those slot machines," he announced like a trumpet. They turned. Willie dervished and found the cash register. He turned back, smiling, and his eyes refused to meet them out of contempt.

The party was held one Sunday evening. They hadn't wanted to profane the Sabbath, but Sunday was the only day on which the bars were closed. "Oh, comrades," Willie said. "It's good to be here with you. The air is so gentle."

They were assembled on an abandoned farm, located by a small lake. A chateau was at their disposal, perched on the bank above the water. On the second floor of the chateau a little stage had been built. Some of the fellows had been out earlier in the week to make it. They did it gratis. Outside there was food, and cooks to serve it. Ham and beef, pork, Canadian bacon, fish and venison. Barbecues, hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad and baked beans. There was even celery. "Try some of that venison," they said; the sauce ran down their chins. And beer. All the brands that Smithy the distributor handled were iced away in a series of large beer tubs which resembled horse troughs. Each tub of beer had its trademark and an advertisement tacked on a scaffolding behind it. At their pleasure the men could select their favorite brands. "Now stick with me," Harold said.

"Horsefeathers," Willie said and drank his beer.

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As the sun went down, the games of chance came out. Food was cleared off the tables and a craps board laid; the wheel of fortune went up, card parties were starting, and for Smithy the distributor and a few, roulette.

"God, look at them with their money," Harold said. "And some of them don't have a piss pot nor a lid to keep it holy."

"It's astonishing," Willie said. They found a friendly game of craps. "Come on in," Billy Hokes said. "This is for family men." Willie dug in his pockets for change.

"What's that?" Harold said. Among the coins in Willie's hands were some pills. "Salt pills," Willie said. "Genevieve thought I better bring some." They laughed. Willie smiled and put one in his mouth and drank it down with beer.

"Atta boy," they said and clapped him on the back.

Willie won over two dollars the first time he had his hands on the dice. He went for more beer. When he had the dice once more, he doubled up on snake eyes and won again. Harold offered him a cigar, and Willie blew smoke through his nose. There was a scuffle nearby. A young man, marvelously muscled and nude to the waist, jumped on a table. He waved a quart of whiskey. "I can lick any man here," he said, "and I'll drink whiskey if I want to." Then he stepped backwards and lay moaning on the ground with a broken collar bone. "Say, that's that Haines boy," Harold said. "You'd better drive him into town, Willie."

"I don't have a car, what's the matter with you?"

"I'll lend you mine."

"Nope," Willie said, wiping off the mouth of a beer bottle.

"Didn't we all fight in the wars together?" Willie drank his beer and looked at Harold askance. They laid the Haines boy in the back of a panel truck and drove off. "Damn fools," Willie said.

Willie kept winning; he counted off ten dollars, put it away in his wallet, and finished another bottle of beer. A hush fell over the players. Harold stood up. "What's that?"

"A big truck."

"I know it's a big truck," Harold said annoyed. "And what's more they're delivering a piano at the house."

"Well, don't get hostile."

"Why didn't they deliver it in the daytime, that's what I want to know," Harold said. They stood up to watch the unloading of the piano. "She shall have music wherever she goes," Willie said.

Billy Hokes picked up his money and left. "Where you going?" Harold said.

"I think I'll go on up to the house and wait," Billy said.

"Billy's a widower," Willie said. They returned to the game. Occasionally they had to shout to make themselves heard because that bartender from the Shangri-La Tavern kept walking back and forth among the tables screaming. Three fellows got him and took him down and threw him in the lake. The ensuing silence made them jittery. Harold stood up, and then the others. "Oh—it's nothing, I guess," Harold said, and they knelt down once more. But a minute later Harold was up again. "What's that?"

"A big black sedan."

"Dammit, I know it," Harold said. Some women got out of the car and ran into the house like celebrities. The men threw a few more dice, but shortly in groups of two and three they picked up their money and strolled toward the house. They talked of automobiles, hunting, and the New York Yankees, leaving at the tables only those who were winning and the men who were desperately losing.

Inside the house it was terribly hot and the smoke made the eyes burn. Willie took another salt pill. "Well, now's the time," Harold said; "I always believe in going whole hog at these things," and he pulled a bottle of whiskey from his pocket. He offered Willie some. A man climbed on the stage and began poking at the piano, and a fiddle player joined him. The men fell silent. The musicians faltered into "Sweet Georgia Brown," and the first girl came out. "Thank God she's young," Harold said. Willie was astonished. He had seen pictures of girls before but this one was real. Her flanks were so trim and white, and her breasts. The girl finished her act and the men applauded and called for more. "More!" Willie bellowed and the men looked at him. He grabbed Harold's whiskey and took a long drink. Two more girls came out and went through a routine much like the first. When they had finished, the applause was unanimous. The men were roughhousing; they loosened their ties and called for beer, and here and there some of the old fellows like Harold and Willie had wormed closer to the stage. The musicians bounced into a jazz number, and the first girl reappeared. Obviously this was different, she meant business. Billy Hokes stood up on a chair. She capered and gamboled and finished in a sweat. The next girl came out like a comet. "Look what she's doing," Harold said. With one leap Willie sprang up on Billy's chair and

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knocked Billy among the crowd. That would have meant a fight except that in the melee Willie fell too, and Billy didn't know who pushed him. Picking himself up from the floor Willie realized what it was that had been bothering him for the last hour or two. He had lost the tie-clasp which Genevieve had given him for Christmas. But he wasn't sure yet; he would look in his pocket later. When the third girl finished, the men were knocking each other around, and several fights nearly started. Someone stood on a chair, waving a bottle. "God bless you, Mr. Smith. I've never had such a good time." He fainted. Mr. Smith accepted the tribute smiling, and one of his friends pushed his hat down over his eyes.

The little band rested, but the men couldn't stand it. They broke into yells and staccato clapping. At an invisible cue, the piano player beat down on his instrument, and the three women, nude, came out in a group. They danced and were bold together. Willie was right by the stage; he couldn't look at them for guilt. He put his hands over his ears, unconsciously hearing the crescendo of sound each time he released his fingers. Genevieve in France, he thought; he grabbed for Harold's bottle.

They were proposing something special on the stage. "Here's your man," Harold said. "Give an old man a chance."

"Aw, now," Willie said, but he felt himself lifted bodily onto the stage.

"Now, let's be sensible," Willie said, turning around and preparing to go down, but the girls were encouraging him. They were beside him warm and golden in the naked light. He could touch them. They were dragging him toward the center of the stage and pulling at his clothes. "Don't," he said, slapping at them. One stood directly before his eyes, and Willie felt annihilating lust flood up from somewhere in his loins. He wanted to speak something tender. "Oh, young ladies," he said. They were all around him, interring him with their foreign smell. He reached out, he wanted to hold her young body before everyone—

Blood was coming out of Willie's nose. It had covered his chin and was spreading on his shirt front.

"Oh Genevieve," Willie said. The men began to mutter. Willie dropped to his knees and lowered his head. Blood dripped onto his trousers. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," he began. One of the girls cried out. She was hitting Willie on the shoulders and head. "Make him stop. Help me. Stop the damn fool."

# MASON JORDAN MASON:

## Consummatum est

Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem  
thou crown of creation  
thou jeweled crown

And if I owned a mad dog  
ugly as you are  
I would name him

Shamen

And shave his ass  
with a broken mirror  
and paint it with turpentine

And train him to walk backwards

## Whizzbone the Warbleloot

Handsome walking the platform  
so mighty  
with a tail  
like a slender yellow gal

Whizzbone whizzbone  
warbleloot so mighty  
walking that platform  
like a high yellow gal

Like spats  
like cane  
like a high hat and all  
but them old eyelids  
drooped like a debauched turtle's



but only the angels  
have to work like that

Providing of course  
these books  
know what they make out like

## FLORA J. ARNSTEIN:

### Gulls

Ducks in their trundle,  
Swans in their dream, slow-wheeling,  
And the provincial mud-hen—  
Patterns of accessible bird.

But the gull of the quirked beak  
And pirate stilt—  
Violent of wing and partisan of sea  
Is feather-kin to none.

The thwart adequacy of land,  
The arc, lonely in the turn—  
Through the palmed tail the sun  
Tracing structure, tracing relevance . . .

From whatever angle the gulls  
Prompting headlands,  
The agreement of wave,  
The sea, positive in kelp,  
The salt dry and the spume yet spindled—  
The gull speaks these out of braked throat.

Best on spars, spiral to sky,  
Or counter to wind,  
A ravenous path, chipped reversal,  
And oiled landing on any quarried sea.

# MARK SPILKA:

## Was D. H. Lawrence a Symbolist?

In recent studies on D. H. Lawrence, two veteran critics have tried to align him with the *correspondance* tradition established by Baudelaire.<sup>1</sup> They have called him a symbolist out of the reasonable belief that *symbolisme* means the use of private images to suggest or evoke the ineffable. But the question soon arises—which ineffable? There happen to be two, at least in philosophical and religious circles, and Lawrence himself was always conscious of the fact. Thus, in *Twilight in Italy* he speaks of the twofold Infinite: "the Father and the Son, the Dark and the Light, the Senses and the Mind, the Soul and the Spirit, the self and the not-self. . . . The consummation of man is twofold, in the Self and in Selflessness. . . . And man must know both." Now *symbolisme* implies a wholly different metaphysic than this, since most or perhaps all of its adherents are searching for the spiritual infinite. It seems wrong, therefore, to speak too readily about Lawrence, the symbolist, or even to be led astray by the suggestive nature of his language, or by the use in his novels of dominant symbols like the *symbole littéraire*. As Mark Schorer has pointed out, Lawrence is essentially a ritualist; his symbols function through the larger pattern of the ritual, and, as I hope to show in this essay, they also function at a different level of language; and for different ends, than the *symbole littéraire*.

To grasp the problem clearly, we must turn, for a moment, to an extremely pertinent theory of language, myth, and religion put forth by Ernst Cassirer. As the German philosopher explains it:

Language moves in the middle kingdom between the 'indefinite' and the 'infinite'; it transforms the indeterminate into a determinate idea, and then holds it within the sphere of finite determinations. So there are, in the realm of mythic and religious conception, 'ineffables' of different order, one of which represents the lower limit of verbal expression, the other the upper limit; but between these bounds, which are drawn by the very nature of verbal expression, language can move with perfect freedom, and exhibit all the wealth and concrete exemplification of its creative power.

For Cassirer, then, the religious symbol operates at the upper level of language; in metaphorical terms, it reaches out, encircles some

aery corner of the spiritual infinite, then pulls it down within the middle kingdom and holds it there within its determinate form. And the *symbole littéraire* (or the pure poem itself, as conceived by Mallarmé) performs essentially the same function. But at the lower level of language the problem is altogether different. Speaking again in metaphorical terms, when the mythic symbol reaches out, it encounters *mana*,<sup>2</sup> that vague, mysterious, holy power which pops up out of a mythical field of force and appears now here, now there, in any guise, in front of primitive man. Unlike the spiritual infinite, which is static, absolute and eternal, *mana* is a highly relative and kinetic force which occurs in time. Hence the mythic symbol can only focus our attention, at best, upon the ebb and flow of this relative force, while the religious symbol, or the *symbole littéraire*, can theoretically hold or fix the spiritual infinite within a timeless moment. And neither symbol can perform the other's function.

In the light of these arguments, the distance between Lawrence and the symbolists becomes enormous: for Baudelaire and his followers, Nature was a mere "forest of symbols," an outward front for the spiritual infinite; but Lawrence found the force of life itself in Nature, and he made a close connection between that force and the *mana* concept. He utilized that concept, for example, in novels like *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, where the moon sometimes becomes a sudden "presence" to his protagonists; and he wrote about it directly in *Apocalypse*, where he deals specifically with the old Greek version of *mana*, the *theos* concept:

To the ancient consciousness . . . the universe was a great complex activity of things existing and moving and having effect. . . . Everything was *theos*; but even so, not at the same moment. At the moment, whatever struck you was god. If it was a pool of water, the very watery pool might strike you: then that was god; or a faint vapour at evening rising might catch the imagination: then that was *theos*; or thirst might overcome you at the sight of the water: then the thirst itself was god; or you drank, and the delicious and indescribable slaking of thirst was the god; or you felt the sudden chill of the water as you touched it: and then another god came into being, "the cold": and this was not a quality, it was an existing entity, almost a creature, certainly a *theos*.

The difficulty which Lawrence has in describing *theos* is not his own: for primitive man, *theos* (or *mana*) was too vague and impermanent for precise description; hence he used the term as noun, verb, adjective, or adverb with equal readiness. This helps to account, inci-

dentally, for much of the well-known "carelessness" in Lawrence's writing. The symbolists can afford to be precise in their poems: their version of the infinite is fixed and static, waiting for the proper language to encase it. But *mana* demands a much more volatile medium, not to encase it, but simply to keep pace with it and to keep it in focus. So it seems unfair to isolate a nebulous passage by Lawrence, as some critics have done, and to compare it unfavorably with a more precise example of symbolist art. For the truth is that Lawrence actually fused the *mana* concept with this own particular view of "quickness" in both life and language. We see this, unmistakably, in a passage from an essay called "The Novel":

We have to choose between the quick and the dead. The quick is God-flame, in everything. And the dead is dead. In this room where I write, there is a little table that is dead: it doesn't even weakly exist. And there is a ridiculous little iron stove, which for some unknown reason is quick. And there is an iron wardrobe trunk, which for some still more mysterious reason is quick. And there are several books, whose mere corpus is dead, utterly dead and non-existent. And there is a sleeping cat, very quick. And a glass lamp, that, alas, is dead.

What makes the difference? *Quién sabe?* But difference there is. And I *know* it.

And the sum and source of all quickness, we will call God. And the sum and total of all deadness we may call human.

And if one tries to find out wherein the quickness of the quick lies, it is in a certain weird relationship between that which is quick and—I don't know; perhaps all the rest of things. It seems to consist in an odd sort of fluid, changing, grotesque, or beautiful relatedness. That silly iron stove somehow *belongs*. Whereas this thin-shanked table doesn't belong. It is a mere disconnected lump, like a cut-off finger.

And now we see the great, great merits of the novel. It can't exist without being "quick." . . . For the relatedness and interrelatedness of all things flows and changes and trembles like a stream, and like fish in the stream the characters in the novel swim and drift and float and turn belly-up when they're dead.

All this is close, in a modified and intelligent way, to the *mana* concept; and we might even note, in passing, the equally close connection Lawrence makes between life and the novel, in terms of organic flow. But for the moment the important points to stress are these: (1) that Lawrence had found corroboration for his independent sense of the quickness, the interrelatedness of all things, by reading the anthropologists—not Baudelaire; and (2) that he seems to have

borrowed the holiness and perhaps the volatility of *mana* and merged this with his own concept of the life-flame, to arrive—not at synaesthesia—but at the God-stuff, or the life-force, which flows through all “live” objects and binds man to the living universe. We can see this force at work, very clearly, in a lengthy excerpt from the opening pages of *The Rainbow*:

So the Brangwens came and went without fear of necessity, working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of the money. . . . They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and interrelations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away. The young corn waved and was silken, and the lustre slid along the limbs of the men who saw it. They took the udder of the cows, the cows yielded milk and pulse against the hands of the men, the pulse of the blood of the teats of the cows beat into the pulse of the hands of the men. They mounted their horses, and held life between the grip of their knees, they harnessed their horses at the wagon, and, with hand on the bridle-rings, drew the heaving of the horses after their will. . . .

It was enough for the men, that the earth heaved and opened its furrow to them, that the wind blew to dry the wet wheat, and set the young ears of corn wheeling freshly round about; it was enough that they helped the cow in labour, or ferreted the rats from under the barn, or broke the back of a rabbit with a sharp knock of the hand. So much warmth and generation and pain and death did they know in their blood, earth and sky and beast and green plants, so much exchange and interchange they had with these, that they lived full and surcharged, their senses full fed, their faces always turned to the heat of the blood, staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation, unable to turn round.

Lawrence is decidedly moving about, in this passage, at the lower level of language; he is dealing with a vague but nourishing force or flow which occurs *in time*,<sup>8</sup> and which plays an important and distinctly religious role in the novel: the Brangwen men enjoy “blood-intimacy” with the life around them; they must learn to utilize this contact for creative ends; and in order to achieve organic being, they



must also learn to transcend it. But opposed to the "rainbow," or the round arch of full organic life, is the pointed arch of the cathedral, the symbol of Christianity. And to treat Christianity properly, Lawrence had to shift over to the upper level of language and deal in terms of "soul-intimacy" with the Christian infinite, during the *timeless* moment of prayer: which is precisely what happens, midway through the novel, when Will Brangwen enters Lincoln Cathedral.

Then he pushed open the door, and the great, pillared gloom was before him, in which his soul shuddered and rose from her nest. . . . His soul leapt up into the gloom, into possession, it reeled, it swooned with a great escape, it quivered in the womb, in the hush and the gloom of fecundity, like seed of procreation in ecstasy. . . .

Away from time, always outside of time! Between east and west, between dawn and sunset, the church lay like a seed in silence, dark before germination, silenced after death. Containing birth and death, potential with all the noise and transitation of life, the cathedral remained hushed, a great involved seed, whereof the flower would be radiant life inconceivable, but whose beginning and whose end were the circle of silence. Spanned round with the rainbow, the jewelled gloom folded music upon silence, light upon darkness, fecundity upon death, as a seed folds leaf upon leaf and silence upon the root and the flower, hushing up the secret of all between its parts, the death out of which it fell, the life into which it has dropped, the immortality it involves, and the death it will embrace again.

Here in the church, "before" and "after" were folded together, all was contained in oneness. . . .

If we compare this with the previous passage in aim, texture, and execution, we can see at once that Lawrence worked at opposite levels of language, and with two distinct concepts of the ineffable. That he could do so successfully is not simply an indication of versatility, but a confirmation of the actual religious dimension of his writings. We find this same striking contrast in still other works: in *Sons and Lovers* there is the close, heavy, timeless spiritual communion over flowers between Paul Morel and Miriam Leivers, and there is the bright, open, sensual engagement with the natural world which Paul and his mother enjoy; in "The Man Who Died" there is the dramatic contrast between the cold, timeless nullity of the tomb and the bloom of life in the peasant's yard:

The man who had died looked nakedly on life, and saw a vast resoluteness everywhere flinging itself up in stormy or subtle wave-crests, foam-tips emerging out of the blue invisible, a black and orange cock or the green flame-tongues out of the extremes of the fig-tree. They came forth, these things and creatures of the spring,

glowing with desire and with assertion. They came like crests of foam, out of the blue flood of the invisible desire, out of the vast invisible sea of strength, and they came coloured and tangible, evanescent, yet deathless in their coming.

Even the young gamecock is a crest on "the swaying ocean of life," and we see, perhaps for the first time, that the quickness and spontaneity of Lawrence's prose—its transcendent quality—is almost always "supplied" by the primitive indefinite, the life-force, and not, as some writers have suggested, by either the Christian or the symbolist version of the infinite.<sup>4</sup>

## II

But the distance between Lawrence and the symbolists is more than a matter of language and metaphysics. There is also the problem of "the self and the not-self" to contend with. In their search for the spiritual absolute, for example, the symbolists lead us away from life toward realms of non-being. One thinks of Mallarmé, who sat before a mirror while writing his poems—not out of vanity, but to prevent his disappearance into nothingness; or of Valéry's preoccupation with suicide, and of the positive value which he placed upon non-being. What is at stake here, then, is the whole symbolist effort to "transcend man." Their version of the infinite occurs outside of *life* as well as time, since life is merely finite. So by definition, the symbolist poem is an organization of sensory material for static, timeless, and essentially non-human (or non-finite) ends. Of course, the final product may "transfigure life," but the structure of the poem remains unaltered.

On the other hand, Lawrence saw the life-force as the source of all vitality, and accordingly he found a central and significant role for "his" ineffable in daily life, in time, in basic human experience. Thus the chief emphasis, throughout his work, is on greater fullness of being, through love, friendship, and creative labor—through situations, in other words, which involve some vital form of communion between man and man, or even between man and the living universe. In the short story "Sun," for instance, a woman moves from the sterile touch of her husband to life-giving contact with the sun. This contact is organic and dramatic, but only in a focal sense, symbolic. Through daily rites with the sun, new powers of consciousness are aroused within the woman's body. She becomes a fuller person through these rites: and this is the pattern—resurrection through ritual—which Lawrence follows in most of his works.

Or destruction through ritual, the other side of the coin. And for

this, take the chapter called "Rabbit" in *Women in Love*, where Gerald Crich and Gudrun Brangwen attempt to subdue the stubborn rabbit, Bismarck, the squirming bundle of life which young Winifred Crich values as *un mystère, ein Wunder*. But each of them is badly scratched in the process, and as the rabbit bursts wildly around a small enclosed yard, they mock it, they show each other the deep scars on their arms, and smile obscenely, as initiates to the "abhorrent mysteries" which will surely follow. This is their bond or pledge, then, their ritual initiation to the violent ripping at each other's souls which will end in Gerald's death. Only the child Winifred sees the rabbit as magnificently alive: "Let its mother stroke its fur then, darling, because it is so mysterious," she says as the chapter ends.

Now the whole interplay between Gerald, Gudrun, and the rabbit is direct and vivid, and relative to a particular stage in the novel. As a symbol, the rabbit simply holds that stage in focus, but as a living animal he participates in the rite between Gudrun and Gerald. This is not, in other words, a vague, suggestive, static moment—a *symbole littéraire*—but a definite and spontaneous pledge between two future lovers to destroy the life within themselves, to deny or exploit the life-flame itself, the mystery and wonder embodied by the rabbit.

"Isn't it a *fool*! [cried Gudrun]. Isn't it a sickening *fool*?" The vindictive mockery in her voice made [Gerald's] brain quiver. Glancing up at him, into his eyes, she revealed again the mocking, white-cruel recognition. There was a league between them, abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries.

"How many scratches have you?" he asked, showing his hard forearm, white and hard and torn in red gashes.

"How really vile!" she cried, flushing with a sinister vision. "Mine is nothing."

She lifted her arm and showed a deep red score down the silken white flesh.

"What a devill!" he exclaimed. But it was as if he had had knowledge of her in the long red rent of her forearm, so silken and soft. He did not want to touch her. He would have to make himself touch her, deliberately. The long, shallow red rip seemed torn across his own brain, tearing the surface of his ultimate consciousness, letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond.

Such ritual scenes occur as early, in Lawrence's work, as *Sons and Lovers*, where the living relationship between men, women, and flowers is used to push the story along: take Mrs. Morel's garden-swoon, for example, before Paul's birth; or the whole attempt by

Paul and Miriam to commune over flowers, *à la* Wordsworth; or the extraordinary flower-picking scene between Paul, Miriam, and Clara; the floral benediction as Paul and Clara make love; and finally, the spontaneous gift of flowers to Miriam at the novel's end. But there is no space here to explicate such complicated patterns. For the moment I simply want to emphasize that most of Lawrence's works move forward through ritual scenes, toward ritualistic ends. For just as the essence of religious ritual is communion, so Lawrence saw all deeply significant contacts—between human beings, or even between man and the living universe—as spontaneous forms of communion, either sacred or debased, either nourishing or reductive; and just as the old primitive "rites of passage" always centered upon such basic events as birth, rebirth into manhood, death, and resurrection to the greater life beyond, so Lawrence's stories always center upon "rebirth" and "death"—the emergence into greater or lesser forms of being. But therefore the sexual scenes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can only be understood as "dramatic" rites of communion. And even the famous moon scenes, in both *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow*, can only be understood in terms of actual rapport, pro and con, between the protagonists and the moon-as-living-force: these men and women participate, that is to say, in ritualistic situations which fall within the larger flow of the novels. And so, as the novels move along, these figures rise up toward organic being, as certain statues of Rodin rise up out of a raw rough marble base—still rooted in the vague unknown, but nonetheless organic in themselves.

### III

If this line of argument proves correct, then Lawrence scarcely qualifies as a symbolist; if anything, he stands opposed to this tradition on metaphysical and ontological grounds. But there is still another category to consider: the realm of "pure aesthetics." It is true, for example, that some of the later poets did not pursue the infinite; they concerned themselves with formal or aesthetic matters, to the point where symbolism became a mere question of technique. Yet even these disciples aimed at static and gratuitous beauty, if only to give order to their poems. In the meantime, Lawrence saw the novel in terms of organic *flow*, as a delicate balance of wholly fluid relationships, and he evolved his own kinetic brand of art to handle them.<sup>5</sup>

A typical short story, "The Blind Man," may help to clarify the problem. For the central and pervading symbol of the story—Maurice Pervin's blindness—is only a point of focus for a special condition of

being in Pervin himself, and for the special conditions of his marriage; and though these various conditions might be vague and obscure in texture, they are never static, and their nature and direction are known to both Lawrence and the reader. Here, for example, is a revealing description of Pervin's blindness:

Pervin moved about almost unconsciously in his familiar surroundings, dark though everything was. He seemed to know the presence of objects before he touched them. It was a pleasure to him to rock thus through a world of things, carried on the flood in a sort of blood-prescience. He did not think much or trouble much. So long as he kept this sheer immediacy of blood-contact with the substantial world he was happy, he wanted no intervention of visual consciousness. In this state there was a certain rich positivity, bordering sometimes on rapture. Life seemed to move in him like a tide lapping, lapping and advancing, enveloping all things darkly. It was a pleasure to stretch forth the hand and meet the unseen object, clasp it, and possess it in pure contact. He did not try to remember, to visualize. He did not want to. The new way of consciousness substituted itself in him.

This new way of consciousness is the famous "phallic" or bodily form of consciousness, and Pervin's sense of the life-flow can easily be traced to its awakening. His blindness has resulted, in other words, in a change of being, and this change has led in turn to closer contact with the primitive indefinite. This is the nature of his emotional state, and a moment later Lawrence reveals its direction:

The rich suffusion of this state generally kept him happy, reaching its culmination in the consuming passion for his wife. But at times the flow would seem to be checked and thrown back. Then it would beat inside him like a tangled sea, and he was tortured in the shattered chaos of his own blood. He grew to dread this arrest, this throw-back, this chaos inside himself, when he seemed merely at the mercy of his own powerful and conflicting elements. How to get some measure of control or surety, this was the question. And when the question rose maddening in him, he would clench his fists as if he would *compel* the whole universe to submit to him. But it was in vain. He could not even compel himself.

Thus Pervin, like the Brangwen men in *The Rainbow*, is caught and held within a state of blood-prescience. And the potential danger of that state is kept in focus by a series of kinetic, if symbolic, scenes. The blind man moves forward toward his wife, Isabel, for instance, out of the fecund darkness of the barn. His wife can actually *feel*

him coming toward her, and the darkness itself seems like "a strange swirl of violent life . . . upon her." She feels giddy, and afraid even of her husband as she meets him in his own rich world of unresolved blood-intimacy—so that the scene can only be described, in ritualistic terms, as a communion of fear.

A similar scene occurs when husband and wife sit down to dinner with their special guest, the intellectual "neuter," Bertie Reid. But here, in the safety of the house, the scar on Pervin's face suggests to Isabel that her husband, "so strong-blooded and healthy," is also cancelled out. The scar strikes Bertie this way too. He looks away from it with difficulty, and, "without knowing what he did," he picks up "a little crystal bowl of violets" and sniffs at them. The flowers, of course, are alive and organic, while Pervin remains fixed within a single form of consciousness. Thus an awkward moment occurs when Reid places them in Maurice's hands, so he may smell them too. Both Isabel and Reid are afraid and deeply disturbed at this point, and again we have, in ritualistic terms, a mounting communion of fear.

This fear is dissolved, however, with the final ritual scene. Later that evening, Bertie looks for Maurice and finds him in the barn, pulping turnips. The two begin to chat about Isabel's happiness, Maurice's scar, and the casual nature of their own acquaintanceship. Then Maurice suddenly asks if he may touch him. Bertie complies, reluctantly, and Maurice gathers his head in his sensitive fingers, shifts and adjusts his grasp until he has covered the whole face, then grasps the shoulder, arm, and hand before him. The bachelor lawyer feels annihilated by all this; he quivers with revulsion as Maurice asks him now to touch his own blind eyes. But again he complies:

He lifted his hand, and laid the fingers on the scar, on the scarred eyes. Maurice suddenly covered them with his own hand, pressed the fingers of the other man upon his disfigured eye-sockets, trembling in every fibre, and rocking slightly, slowly, from side to side. He remained thus for a minute or more, whilst Bertie stood as if in a swoon, unconscious, imprisoned.

Then suddenly Maurice removed the hand of the other man from his brow, and stood holding it in his own.

"Oh, my God," he said, "we shall know each other now, shan't we? We shall know each other now."

Where Joyce might see an epiphany in such an experience (a static, timeless manifestation of some spiritual essence), Lawrence sees instead a kinetic transformation of being, in both Pervin and Reid. Thus Maurice stands "with his feet apart, like a strange colossus," when

the two return to Isabel; while Bertie is now "like a mollusc whose shell is broken." Through the friendship rite, one man moves toward greater fullness of being; his blindness is transcended, his unresolved blood-intimacy released, and the limited circle of marriage itself is broken by "the new delicate fulfillment of mortal friendship"; but the other man is destroyed by the experience—his outer bulwark against life is smashed, his inner vacuum thoroughly exposed. Thus the ritual pattern of the story is complete.

By setting off Lawrence against the symbolists in this manner, by giving as much credence to his metaphysics as we normally give to theirs, we are able to see what sort of artist Lawrence actually is. And seeing this much, becoming more familiar, as it were, with the ritual pattern of his work, we can at last answer some of the more popular charges against him: namely, that he had no operative sense of form; that his work was merely impressionistic; or that he kept remarkable faith with the living moment, yet never produced a complete work of art. As Frederic Hoffman states it:

Form for Lawrence was unimportant—though he was capable of writing aptly finished short tales and novelettes, his longer novels are held together by a succession of moments of crucial experience; its continuity is fitful, the *modus vivendi* a series of revitalized crises of bodily relationships.

This criticism is sound, in part, but Hoffman falsely assumes that emotional life is formless in itself. Apparently, Lawrence felt otherwise. His faith in the living moment was uniquely counterbalanced by his faith in the human soul, whose death and resurrection, within the living body, was his chief concern. And so, to accommodate his concept of the soul, as a stable but ever-changing element, a kind of second ego which moves along within the flux of life, waxing and waning in accord with man's emotional experience, he discovered and employed emotional form; he learned to deal, directly or obliquely, with specific states of being; he learned, quite literally, to chronicle the movements of the soul. Thus, in the better part of his writing, the "crucial moments" always mount or flow toward definite ends, and Hoffman, among others, fails to account for this fact. Granted, the emotional form breaks down or backs against itself, like Pervin's sensual flow, whenever Lawrence wrestles with those problems which he cannot solve. But significantly enough, this breakdown coincides with the troubled middle period of his life—the period stretching from *The Lost Girl* through *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *The*

*Boy in the Bush*, and *The Plumed Serpent*. But the four major novels—those which express his finest psychological and moral insights—are all well-organized along ritualistic lines. It seems scarcely accidental, then, that a man is born at the end of *Sons and Lovers*; a woman, as *The Rainbow* ends; while in *Women in Love* a man and a woman meet and marry—and conceive a child some eight years later, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. For these four novels represent an impressive and decidedly artistic attempt, on Lawrence's part, to set forth the conditions of manhood, womanhood, and marriage, as he felt or understood them in his own life. These novels coincide, that is, with his own "rites of passage."

#### NOTES

1. In *The Later D. H. Lawrence*, William York Tindall makes extravagant and extensive claims for Lawrence-as-symbolist. In *The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence* and more recently in *The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence*, Harry T. Moore takes a much more qualified approach; he simply holds that Lawrence used symbolist techniques during a particular phase of his career. Such notions are not, of course, without cause or precedent. In the early 1930's both Anaïs Nin and Francis Fergusson had written on the suggestive and subjective nature of Lawrence's symbols, though without comparing him specifically with the *symbolistes*. This paper owes its genesis, incidentally, to conversations with Mr. Fergusson, who might not agree with all its contents, but who at least made them possible.

2. Presumably, it might also encounter Wordsworth's religious flux, Nietzsche's Dionysian force, or Bergson's *élan vital*. At any rate, we can safely lump these various beliefs together under the general heading of the primitive indefinite, since each of them involves some vague, indefinite force or flow of a religious nature.

3. At the end of the novel, for example, Ursula Brangwen wants "to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of Time."

4. In *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence*, Father William Tiverton speaks of the sense in Lawrence's work "that what is shown as alive owes its aliveness to something behind or above—to the transcendent." But he fails to connect this observation with "dramatic" structure, and he also fails to separate Laurentian transcendence from the usual Christian sense of the term, and thereby robs us of the full import of Lawrence's accomplishment.

5. Mr. Tindall tries to avoid this conclusion in *The Later D. H. Lawrence*; he cites Loerke's notions, in *Women in Love*, on art as non-representational form, to show "that Lawrence had an artist's conception of significant form." And undoubtedly Lawrence did, but he also rejected it: as Ursula Brangwen tells Loerke in the same novel, "The world of art is only the truth about the real world." In other words, Lawrence saw art as a representation of reality, and a kinetic one, and not as "an arrangement of material for an aesthetic [and static] end," as Tindall would have us believe. Unfortunately, Tindall seems to equate Lawrence with other novelists, like Joyce and Mann, who *do* write in the symbolist tradition.



# MILLEN BRAND:

## The End

### 1

On a certain day  
he goes to bed  
weaker,  
definitely weaker.

Earl comes through the rain of wallpaper flowers  
to stay with him.

"I'll get that larger bed for you," he says,  
"from upstairs," and he carries it down,  
the bed that has the smell of the past in its dark wood  
headboard and footboard.

"Thank you, son. It's better."

He lies in this bed with his skin paled to a tulip white,  
and with all the last hollows of the bone,  
at the temples, at the cheeks, and at the eyes sunk  
in weakness and shadow,  
clear

as if a wax burns inside.

Earl thinks,  
He wants to die.  
He's tired.

Perhaps there is a truce at the end between living and dying,  
perhaps life ends in a failing  
graduated downward step by step to the approach of sleep.  
The thought comes willingly  
to the need.

As he lies on the bed,  
his change  
is like the perfect weakness of a cloth  
thrown on the ground.  
His arms lie flat.  
Under the trace of his moustache  
his mouth hardly holds its shape,  
its muscles disarranged

where the cloth fell.  
"Stay near, son," he says  
unclearly.

## 2

The ambulance doors close on him in a narrow room.  
The lights of the night city  
strike into his eyes as at a window  
covered with a blue curtain.  
As the motor catches, awkwardly  
he feels for the edge of the mattress shelf  
and sits up in his mind.

He is climbing one of those long roads in the Smokies  
where the sun falls in streamers  
from the moving arms of trees.  
He is going to Texas.  
"Started Christmas Eve and it took me six days," driving  
the white line.

The fragile frame  
of a dream ball of tumbleweed blows on the road,  
but never comes. It disappears  
like a cat.

The rain is loud over Venita.  
He starts again by car  
for Fort Pierce, but the palms clatter their soft drums  
too steadily and the gartered boles threaten.  
The sun blinds him now and he wants  
only to return, if he can, to his warm wood stove  
whose heat smells of pine and whose safety  
is  
his mother's arms.  
"All right, you take the front."  
So they lift the stretcher out,  
walking into the rear nave.

## 3

"He will live  
three days."  
The right side of his face has swollen hideously to his ear.

---

He taps the counterpane,  
 annoyed with the edema.  
 Five weeks later he is still alive,  
 watching two hornets of dextrose  
 sting his legs. Alive, awake  
 and thinking.

## 4

The swelling has gone down.  
 Licked it again.  
 How many times they told me I would die!  
 I was real sick the first year, being carried on pillows  
 in that clear Kingston air that came  
 though the windows, smelling of tomatoes.  
 Yes, I was a baby on pillows, fed  
 from another's breast, not Susie's.  
 Delicate, but lived.  
 And when I was four, I had that diphtheria.  
 I don't know how long I was sick then,  
 but at the doctor's last visit  
 I was what he claimed was "beyond hope."  
 Wouldn't live the night through, he said.  
 Then that old woman neighbor,  
 Old Lady. Well, I can't remember the name now.  
 She suggested putting a canopy over the bed  
 and slacking lime under it.  
 Him there breathing oxygen  
 under that tent you see through,  
 that's what brings it to mind.  
 I was alive in the morning and the doctor  
 was stumped. You there,  
 you're a pretty thing. Ain't she pretty in that white?  
 In my bones the steps dance.  
 That white lime boiled, it had a rough sound  
 against the mixing hoe or  
 whatever Susie stirred it with. Slaked  
 like thirst. I say, little one,  
 you that's pretty there. Pretty. And she knows it, don't she,  
 cutting away with her white behind?  
 Josie, my oldest sister, carried me

---

when I got stronger,  
 carried me on her back down the stairs.  
 She slipped on the last step and fell against the clothes press.  
 No damage done. We laughed afterwards.

## 5

"When can I go back to Mabel's?"  
 It is that last clear day  
 rising like a water flower slowly  
 to open up on its stem in gray water.  
 Nine men in black coats  
 come to the center of the ward,  
 a pyramid like bowling pins  
 pointing to the long row of beds,  
 and sing.  
 The several notes of their chords  
 part and converge uneasily  
 like the runners of a dream.  
 I sang once  
 like them  
 in a choir.

## 6

He drinks a boat of milk.  
 It is milk he likes most.  
 If they would only  
 give it again, give that nipple hard  
 in its porcelain whiteness, hard and straight  
 and full.  
 "Milk."  
 He wants to lift his hand to it,  
 to guide the flow down. That white cloud.  
 How the slacked lime  
 boiled!

## 7

"My side hurts."  
 He moves,  
 shifting his side with the tired frown blending

"uh"  
 the daylight and the night.  
 Earl touches his old face,  
 giving it the old-time nudge.  
 "Still kicking?"

And he smiles.  
 Smiles with his thickened lips.  
 Smiles with his eyes.  
 Smiles.  
 Smiles the years of the bareback horse  
 at Jim's, skimming to the stable  
 "gee, if you'd seen him go over that bar!"  
 Smiles the years of Eatontown,  
 the damn grubs in the amber jelly  
 at the tree roots, but that one big strike: potatoes.  
 Smiles the years of the looping line  
 whipping out over the wet sea,  
 forever crashing inward from its bed.  
 Alive. Alive  
 and kicking.

## 8

He is alive, his eyes' hope steady  
 when the machine of his blood begins to sound.  
 It "fills."  
 The least ruffle like the spill of a stream  
 begins in his breast.  
 It gets louder and climbs.  
 As it climbs, hour by hour, his eyes change.  
 They say, I can't drown like this  
 inside, can I?  
 and yet  
 this bubble of inside water  
 rising in his throat.  
 The doctor  
 on the last space on his chart, observing him unseen,  
 writes "Fatal."  
 A tap in a nearby basin  
 drips like a clock tick until Earl

comes to his side.

"Hello."

"Hello," he shapes with the great gag of his tongue curling, and his eyes turn like a dog's.

Is it?

Earl props the pillows higher,  
lifting him above the water,  
holding him like a father a son  
out of the stream of fear.

He breathes.

He does not speak, he reaches out  
his hands.

His hands go to the rail of the bed and grasp it,  
they relinquish the rail and in the air  
grasp and close,  
seeming to close on something formed  
by the need of the hands themselves.  
They touch the cover of the bed, fingering it,  
they touch Earl's hands, his sleeve,  
they seem to touch the world farewell.

"Dad."

Now the hands listen, now the grasping hands  
stop.

The basin tap, unchecked, has dripped to dark.

The nurse says:

"I'm sorry, but it's time to go."

"Let me stay. Please," Earl says.

"I'm sorry."

"A few minutes more?"

"You may come back in the morning."

He wants to stay in spite of death itself, but  
he wants as much to go,  
to leave the platform of this rustling stage  
to its own dark.

He bends downward.

Dad listens with his less than ears,  
and with a last curl of his gagged tongue says:  
"Good-by."

---

One eye is closed,  
 the other half open.  
 Half open, it sees.  
 It sees Earl's shape move up  
 out of the morning light,  
 and life  
 behind the eye  
 moves the lips once.

Having waited, having greeted,  
 in that final love  
 he dies.

## DELL HYMES:

### Only a Little Down (or, The Rite Price)

He touched a finger to a pursing lip:  
 Winds went into hiding, as the buds  
 Stopped opening. There was no birdsound at all.

Seated as we were, on the mezzanine,  
 We could delight in every item of  
 The green tableau: the frame of fern for the

Unparting beak, the sculpt eggs white below  
 The poising wing, oh the birds that stayed so one  
 Could count them, and the turned leaf, inset stem—

Then breeze came tearing like a traffic cop,  
 Rounding the corner of the far aisle, then  
 Everywhere petals were spreading, shells broke.

"That," he bowed, "is what it will be like;  
 "As lifelike as ourselves, and elegant,  
 "The perfect gift. And not one fallen leaf—

"For a few thousand down—a *personal* Spring."

## I Do What I Can

His children were kind,  
 If toleration is kindness, and why  
 That small gaunt man  
 Ran off to sea,  
 The children, muttering,  
 Couldn't understand: he was no use,  
 And they'd been tolerant.

What use, what use had the sea  
 For an old inedible man?  
 No use,  
 Observe, at the scrim of receding tide,  
 Wave-battered bones.

Let us gather them together  
 (Newspapers will do)  
 Carry these briny bones out  
 Of a world  
 Of marauding children and piddling dogs.

Collectors of a great city's waste,  
 Admit them to your fire.  
 There's a better sermon,  
 Gautama knew,  
 In its ministry.



THOMAS H. CARTER:

## Wyndham Lewis: The Metaphysics of Reality

HUGH KENNER: *Wyndham Lewis*. New Directions: Makers of Modern Literature.

WYNDHAM LEWIS: *Self Condemned*. Methuen.

The essential Wyndham Lewis, novelist and artist, has too long been obscured by the elegant swirl of his own polemic dust. Typical "criticism" of his work, not much calculated to enlighten the curious (Eliot, for instance, called him "fascinating"; Saul Bellow, "a prize goop"), has been more substantive than literary. Mr. Kenner's scrupulous study, ranging over a career that began as early as 1908, affords us the framework we need to understand Lewis, not as slashing propagandist, but as our most energetic creative intelligence—whose unique concern it has been to define, in words and paint, the nature of the Real.

*Wyndham Lewis*, an incredibly compressed little book, may be read as the story of a man whose native genius, like that of the Hemingway whom Lewis admires, spent half a lifetime to reach the point where most, lesser men begin. In Lewis's case, a compulsively Berkeleian attitude towards the reality of *other* people has formed the essential basis for his aesthetic, and later polemic, practice; it underlies his accomplishments as well as his paradoxically significant failures. At the same time, it should never be forgotten that Lewis was first of all a visual artist (a remarkably skilled one) and that, until his sight failed in 1951, he remained as much a painter as a writer. Obviously here is a key to what Mr. Kenner terms Lewis's "war with time," for painting is a spatial rather than a temporal art.

The present, Lewis early recognized, is not accessible to our apprehension: we are jammed too close to it; thus "There is no Present—there is Past and Future, and there is Art." Time, because it destroys, is the creator's enemy, and he must realize *objects* that are no longer susceptible to the flux, even though he brings them close to death's coldness in the process. Like Wordsworth, the Lewisian artist elects to live on a hill and concentrate on things that endure. It is extremely significant, however, as Kenner observes, that "If you drag the Lewisian artist down into visibility, you find that, being human, he doesn't quite believe in his lonely rôle. . . ."

If, like Descartes, you are prepared to bet solely on your own reality, it follows naturally enough that the characters in your fiction will be puppets dangled from off-stage, and that the protagonist alone will be competent to function as the creator's Ape; but where, in strict Cartesian logic, is the antagonist to spring from? Jove's forehead, of course; Mr. Kenner defines Lewis's twin principles of action as "the Self and Not-self, whose quarrel in Lewis's mind guarantees the energy of his books and pictures." The question is one of tension. We have then, as the artist's deputy, the hero—or Ape—of the creative will;

and the sensual crowd-man, who may be one or many: the social self which the lonely "artist-allotrope" has called up. But the Self, because it has allowed its loneliness to "create" a corrupt alter ego that isn't itself, must inevitably be contemptuous of the Not-self as an inferior being, just as the crowd-man despises the Self for not merging into its crowd-existence. Although Lewis has since stopped trying to impose its outline on the external world, this fundamental conflict continues to generate his characteristic plot, which Mr. Kenner discovers in embryo in the early *Little Review* sketches:

The generic theme of his novels is a battle of personalities which finally erupts from under and *truncates* a mechanical series of actions. . . . Each has up to the moment of that consummation been engaged in the plot of a conventional novel of action (the circus) and simultaneously in a series of tensions whose logic, suddenly intersecting that of convention, precipitates him into the "universe of absence." For the logic of conventional plot unfolds in time, and we get a significant action when, through the agency of personality, Time is denied.

Since the heroes of Lewis's first fictions were really lay-figures animated by their creator's superlative energy, it is no surprise to find them engaged in wholesale attempts to disown or ignore a most persistent past in order to enhance their potency in the present. Mere life, which subjects one to time's mechanical reduction, was unworthy of the Lewisian hero; was suitable merely to receive the waste products of his sterner efforts, which were reserved for Art.

Lewis's quarrel with time—finally resolved in *The Revenge for Love*—didn't limit itself to his characterization. Ordinary sequential prose offered no fit medium for the hero who disdained to submit himself to chronology, and Lewis's effort to provide one more suitable resulted in the creation of what is probably (Joyce aside) the most striking prose style of our century. It exists, as Kenner points out, by reducing the *time*-word, the verb, to impotence:

The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey.

Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight. . . .

If the past, sometimes in the person of old friends, kept turning up to embarrass the Lewis protagonist, Lewis's own determination to have no truck with sequence got him into predictable difficulty when, just prior to the first world war, he abandoned his original pictorial prose to attempt conventional narrative in the composition of *Tarr*. The first portion of this novel, concerned with Frederick Tarr himself, is written in the expected static idiom, an accumulation of striking images which don't do much more than offer themselves for the reader's inspection. Tarr is typically the Lewisian artist who abstracts himself for art; but by the book's end, he has allowed himself to be drawn into the lives of others. The Flaubertian objectivity of the conclusion, Kenner notes acutely, is actually a dodge on the author's part to cover up the fact that a Lewisian paradigm has somehow been corrupted.

The ambiguity in Tarr's treatment—a conflict between a tightly reasoned

metaphysical position and the demands of ordinary narrative (remember also that the Lewisan artist doesn't quite believe in his lonely rôle)—becomes evident with the introduction of Otto Kreisler, who, intended as a kind of opposite number for the hero, blandly proceeds to usurp the reader's—and the author's—attention. A talentless art student who channels *his* energy into the realm of sensation (specifically sex), Kreisler "isn't so much a 'character' as a sort of eyeless, misshapen fish, at home in the prose and moving murkily through it." With the appearance of Kreisler, Lewis's style largely surrendered in its attempt to stand still and devoted itself to the German's compulsive, hallucinated drive towards self-destruction. The result, though curiously mixed, is an impressive tragi-comedy without parallel in English.

The significance of this novel goes beyond its achievement, however; the figures of Tarr and Kreisler suggested the alternatives that were open to Lewis as a dramatic artist. He has stated that the natural condition of *The Enemy* (Lewis's characteristic polemic *persona*) is to be in opposition; hence he chose Tarr. After this decision the previously formulated Vorticism ("a still point," as Kenner defines it, "controls the circling flotsam of demotic living, which in fact circles most wildly in closest proximity to the funnel of calm") became Lewis's chief axis of reference. It is difficult to give an account of Lewis's literary activity from about 1920 to 1937 without being misleading—the years seem paradoxically a waste and a real achievement; but Mr. Kenner neither begs the question of the polemics nor gets bogged down in it.

As early as 1927, in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Lewis announced his defense of the austere, creative intellect against the perpetual effort of the crowd mentality to reduce *all* men to the level of nursery-school mediocrity; this effort he saw manifested in countless ways, from the strait-jacket of family life to Spengler's time-jaunts to Bergson's immersion in flux; and he immediately discerned a fresh "conspiracy." As Kenner shrewdly indicates, Lewis neglected to name the conspirators. His interest in power, like that of Pound or Faulkner, belongs (in Leslie Fiedler's term) to the category of G.I. politics; but, since a movement doesn't require a head to be tangible, this fact in no sense invalidates the tough center of Lewis's criticism.

From the beginning Lewis was highly indignant at those who would reduce human beings to the level of behavioristic machines; but this is pretty much what he did himself when he formulated the comic principles of *The Wild Body* (1927). Since to the observer the element of soul, or inner life, present in certain Breton peasants wasn't visible, Lewis decided—in order to secure the comic effect of men behaving like machines—to treat them as though it didn't exist. Which was well enough in itself (the present writer thinks more highly of these sketches than Mr. Kenner seems to); but soon "The only person the behaviorist had insulted, it appears, was Wyndham Lewis." The result was a series of casually brilliant comic novels which, however one may delight in their unexampled vigor, represent essentially, in Lewis's own words, an "aggrandizement of the trivial." Horace Zagreus, hero of *The Apes of God* (1930), is spokesman for one Pierpoint, an omniscient intellect who wisely conceals his lack of reality (he too is an Ape—for Lewis) by keeping off-stage. The situation is much clearer in the case of the behaviorist-protagonist of *Snoopy Baronet* (1932), who is forced to question his own reality when he perceives

the similarity between his "behavior" and that of a hatter's mechanical dummy.

It took Lewis five years and a botched novel to mobilize his forces around this new insight. Then, in *The Revenge for Love* (1937), appeared some real human beings, capable at last of subordinating the pyrotechnical Lewisian prose to their own frail autonomy. Here the Lewis Ape, a grimly comic Red named Hardcaster, finds his chief spiritual defense, his professionalism, shattered because other personalities have broken through:

But meanwhile a strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed at the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the passionate, the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating, voice, and crying to him now to give back, she implored him, the young man, Absalom, whose life he had had in his keeping, and who had somehow, unaccountably, been lost, out of the world and out of Time! He saw a precipice. And the eyes in the mask of THE INJURED PARTY dilated in a spasm of astonished self-pity. And down the front of the mask rolled a sudden tear, which fell upon the floor of the dirty prison.

This was followed by *The Vulgar Streak* (1941), in which the Lewisian hero, inhabiting for the second or third time a world of similarly real people, characteristically disowns the Past, only to discover by so doing he has betrayed himself, and those he loves, into disaster—a far cry from the non-causal Vorticist universe of Frederick Tarr. The protagonists, the Apes, of Lewis's recent fictions, it appears almost superfluous to add, have been involved with characters whose reality is as unquestionable as their own. Reality, no longer a question of kind, has become one of degree. In fact, Lewis's postwar criticism has been concerned, not with the metaphysics of reality, but simply with what is *true*. The Wild Body, itself as much a machine as ever, has got back its soul.

I have intended to do little more than suggest the hard core of Mr. Kenner's informative book. Like the author's earlier salvage job on Pound, *Wyndham Lewis* performs well a task that needed badly to be done, clearing away the fogs of prejudice and falsity from a major artist (who was of course there all the time) and elevating the achieved work into a fresh and decent perspective. It need hardly be said that many critics spend their energy checking familiar structures for termites; but it has been Mr. Kenner's felicitous job, by recalling us to some of our most significant writing, to erect foundations for new edifices.

*Self Condemned*, Lewis's first novel in fourteen years, has nearly the appearance of a carefully timed dramatization of Mr. Kenner's study. René Harding, like an academic version of *The Enemy*, decides that the history he teaches, its emphasis on crowned thugs and sanctioned homicide, is not worthy the attention of civilized men; he discards, by resigning his professorship, not merely his personal Past but that of humanity—a protest no one, not even his wife, can be made to understand. In desperation he moves to Canada, where he and his wife are exiled in penury by the advent of world war. Incompatible

on any level above sheer sex, the two exiles are drawn together by their bitter circumstances—until their third-class hotel burns down. As their fortunes begin to improve, Harding resolves never again to be reduced to poverty, while his wife fixes irrationally on the idea of escape home to England. This latter alternative, in effect a return to indigence, would frustrate Harding's growing success; callously he refuses any real communication with his wife, who finally throws herself under the wheels of a truck. Harding first blocks from his consciousness all thought of his wife, then rationalizes his memory of her into the false image of a stupidly selfish woman. When the book ends, Harding, now an "academic shell," has joined the faculty of a large U.S. university.

The whole of *Self Condemned*, grinding forward less on a plot's slick joints than with the inevitability of a glacier, is articulated with all the solidity of felt experience; but Lewis's objectivity, with *The Enemy* (perhaps) held in merciless focus, never wavers. The rightness or wrongness of Harding's initial idealism is of no dramatic importance; what counts is that, after his early Canadian deprivation, he doesn't *care*. A sensitive and intelligent individual, stubbornly insisting on a private reality, has let himself be converted into something of a monster. It is tempting (though irrelevant) to probe *Self Condemned* for the bare bones of autobiography; but the parallel is false. Lewis was never—and this fine novel is certainly not the only proof—Harding's kind of failure.

## BABETTE DEUTSCH:

### "Everything Has Its Own Speed"

E. E. CUMMINGS: *Poems, 1923-1954*. Harcourt, Brace.

JAMES STEPHENS: *Collected Poems*. New, Revised and Enlarged Edition. Macmillan.

"Oh for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts!" cried a poet in his youth. The gift was granted, but to another poet, and a century later. If Cummings at sixty has not grown to the stature of Keats when he died at twenty-six, neither has he lost his verve. The young delight in his frank sexuality, his gay brutality, his undiminished romanticism. So, with reservations, do his aging contemporaries, who still smile wryly over some of his satires and admire those lyrics electric with immediacy.

The thing presented may be a moment of tenderness, lust, or scorn; it may be the glimpse of a skyscraper, a street corner, a little animal, a face; it may be lovely or ugly; what the successful poem translates into Cummings' idiom is the assault of experience, like a kiss or a slap. This is the child's "puddle-wonderful" world, where intensity suddenly and briefly magnifies the trivial into a major event. There are paths here that lead into Blake's country, into the region where a Zen Buddhist might feel at home. Cummings does not explore them. His gifts are of another order, and he exerts them in other ways.

He did not need to announce to his readers that he is "abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement." Practically every page of this stout volume testifies to the fact. When he writes about apples, they are not resting in a fruit dish, but being pulled from the bough and falling to the ground. When he describes a sunset, a goat must be wandering about in it. His portraits in verse, whether of public performers, of such pleasant private characters as ruddy Mr. Lyman fresh from a funeral, or of various drunks and whores, show people in motion. Perhaps because, loving movement, he is so skilful in recording it, he pushes aside the metaphysical concerns that give scope and depth to the work of a religious poet like Eliot, Auden, or Thomas, and to that of a secular philosopher like Wallace Stevens, as irrelevant to his pleasures. Prominent among these is the explosion of schoolboy obscenities. They are tiresome, and when he parades his ivyleague prejudices one wonders why the vicious forces of reaction should find a friend in this anarchist from New England. But Cummings does not always indulge his adolescent humor when dealing either with the socio-political climate or with the "little ladies more than dead" (a phrase he likes well enough to use on two occasions). There is vigor in his caricatures of patrioteers in and out of uniform, health in his angry laughter at those who worship the idols of the tribe and the marketplace and who would destroy heretics like pacifists and poets. Cummings can evoke the sordidness of Nighttown and its environs with a brutal honesty which is the more remarkable in a poet capable of a delicacy equally precise. Few lyricists have celebrated the wonder of early love and the joys of gratified desire with his candor and accuracy. Few are so successful at galvanizing the reader into awareness.

Cummings' absorption in movement is that of a child, but his passion for the precision which creates it is that of the craftsman. Thus his exact timing literally resurrects Buffalo Bill

who used to  
ride a watersmooth-silver  
                stallion  
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

## Jesus

—we echo, "he was a handsome man." The same precision splits and whips and spins the syllables that miraculously cohere as the "spun=flash" of Paul Draper. In some pieces the stuttering gait of the lines is that of a clowning acrobat whose awkwardness is actually the result of the nicest control. Cummings' broken syllables, his idiosyncratic punctuation, the cubistic tricks that make a printer's nightmare and a laggard reader's despair, can be effective devices. When they are well managed, they create a dynamic whole to be grasped in an instant and studied with satisfaction. But not seldom the demands made upon the reader are out of proportion to the pleasure they may bring him. It is as if the poet invited him to a game of jack-straws, promising to wind up by building an exciting *Gestalt*, but the *Gestalt* speedily collapsed into a heap of jack-straws and the game proved a bore.

There is an enormous gulf between Cummings at the peak of his performance and Cummings when he lapses into adolescent sentimentality or vulgarity, or

is content merely to echo himself. Now and then there are other echoes. Is it Cummings or Sandburg who asks: "—what does it all come down to? love?" and who speaks of "so-longs and ashes"? Is it Cummings or Mr. Vinal who, writing a poem on his lady, draws invidious comparisons with such others as Helen and Cleopatra? There is compensation for the triteness of these allusions in the original turns of phrase that enliven this early lyric. But there is no excuse for repeatedly rhyming "spring" with "sing" or for throwing other rusty razorblades into recent poems. Instance: "—it's april(yes,april,my darling) it's spring!"

Cummings has enlarged and strengthened his vocabulary by turning nouns into verbs, and by reifying conjunctions and pronouns, definite and indefinite articles. It remains limited and remarkably abstract. His tendency toward allegory, however cleverly concealed, stands in the way of the enrichment of concrete particulars that is so precious to poetry. The snow flutters and falls, the moon rises, lovers kiss and couple, mice run across the floor, cats fall on their feet. The event is presented, it is not illuminated. The snowfall, the moonrise, the act of love, like the mouse and the cat, are actual, without, however, being unique. That is one of the reasons why the later poems give the reader a sense of *déjà vu*. It is the more disappointing because, as has been noted, Cummings knows how to draw sharply individualized portraits. Moreover, he can make his abstractions jump about like so many Pinocchios, thumbing their long noses at the truant officer in the liveliest fashion, or, in other lyrics, he will pipe a tune to which the blindest words in the dictionary must dance. His masterly way with rhythm is of course one of the most engaging features of his performance.

So uneven a collection leaves one suspended between impatience with Cummings' lack of discrimination, and pleasure in his achievement. The reader may be outraged or bored. But he is also delighted by the eccentric accuracy with which, at his best, the poet handles language, the impudence that vitalizes his rhythms, the gay energy of his satires on a death-devoted society. And one keeps returning to certain poems: those that peer into the gutters and windows of the Village or the Left Bank, noting the dead fish, the live girls, the broken glass reflecting a piece of sky; those that beat with the pulse of a man in love, whirl in a snow-flurry, climb at the tail of a windy kite. Here is a book that displays, with rare candor, the excitements and the tedium, how much is lacking and how much is satisfying, in "a life of sensations."

In the Introduction to a group of poems that were "New" in 1938, Cummings said that they were written for people like himself by a man who "can never be born enough." In the Preface to his *Collected Poems*, assembled much earlier and now reissued in a revised and enlarged edition, James Stephens remarked: "The duty of the lyrical poet is not to express or explain, it is to intensify life, and its essence is properly indefinable." Stephens is the more explicit of the two, but both poets are obviously saying the same thing, as the performance of both testifies.

In some respects, Stephens is the more faithful follower of tradition. Though he too knew how to break a normal line so as to catch the very twitch and pause and bound of a grazing goat, he had not the inventiveness that went to the setting down of the ideographs for which Cummings is famous. And richly colloquial as are Stephens' adaptations from the Gaelic poets (to whom,

in this edition, credit is not given), he does not reproduce the timbre of the vernacular as does Cummings, recording the speech of Gert the trull and old Nic, the ice, coal, and wood man. But to examine the body of Cummings' work is to recognize that, however diverting his bag of tricks, much of the time he is talking in a conventional way on the traditional subjects of poetry. Stephens, who also writes about the sweets of spring, the joys and sorrows of love, has a lilt, a tempo, a sparkle that quickens such familiar themes and lifts them into the light. He manages his rhythms with the intelligence of a dancer, and whether his vocables sing or whisper or shout, there is always music going on. He uses the device of repetition with uncommon skill. And withal he is a master of brevity, as becomes a man of wit. He once observed that, when he began to write poetry, he found that everything was "moving, . . . going somewhere. So," said he, "I found everything has its own speed. And I tried to put that speed into my verses." This is not so far from Cummings, either, with his passion for movement.

Much as these two have in common, however, there is a vast difference between them. It is not a matter of background, though Stephens never forgot the Dublin slum in which he was born nor Cummings the polite Cambridge of his boyhood and youth. It lies partly in the fact that Cummings has remained, in more ways than one, a sensational poet, while Stephens, content with a somewhat old-fashioned instrument, had the interests of a philosopher and at moments the insight of a mystic. Indeed, there are passages in some of the later poems where he seems to stand for an instant at "the still point of the turning world." That is a significant difference. But there is yet another. Stephens, meditating the universe, can give such full assent to its grandeur that he accepts it in all its cross-grained ugliness and splendor, with the horror and delight that it affords, as an indivisible awful whole. There are times when he seems too ready to sound a note of cheer. Yet repeatedly, emphatically, with grim detail, his poems also acknowledge the ugliness and the horror. Cummings is incapable of assent not because he has another approach to the mystery, but because he keeps his distance from it, being no philosopher. And though he has produced a number of pieces presenting the more repulsive aspects of living and dying in this twentieth century, the fewest of these notations show the humanity of certain of Stephens' lyrics. Cummings entertains us with his goblin mice and toads. Stephens makes us hear the crying of the rabbit caught in a snare. Cummings, outraged by the standardized world he never made, bursts into harsh satiric laughter. Stephens, seeing all awry, could speak out his anger, his grief, without mincing words, often with as much wit as bitterness, and more compellingly because of his restraint. Perhaps because he wrote about the Irish villager rather than about the Greenwich Villager, one is more apt to find an earthiness and an inwardness in his sketches than in Cummings'. Stephens draws his meanest characters with a certain sympathy. He wrote some facile lyrics and some that are unwarrantably full of sweetness and light, but he was never guilty of Cummings' spiritual snobbery. And if he won to serenity in the end, it was not easily achieved.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two poets is that while both of them recognized that "everything has its own speed" and tried to put that speed into their verses, Stephens wrote understandingly about diminished velocities. If Cummings speaks of age, it is almost always with contempt, as



though it were an ignoble disease from which he was himself immune. It may be true that those whom the gods love die young. It is also true that those whom the Muses love do not look away from death's encroachments. Yeats spat into the face of time that had disfigured him, but the deed was an acknowledgment that Cummings refuses to make. And if James Stephens' attitude was one of quiet acceptance, he came to it not by ignoring the work of time but by contemplating eternity. Further, his attitude was an ambivalent one. There are poems of desperation here as well as poems of ecstasy. To read his book is to have a deeper sense of the complexity and cruelty, as well as the gaiety, of life. The stronger lyrics of both men intensify experience. Cummings sometimes does it in a more exciting fashion. James Stephens often does it more resonantly.

## DUDLEY FITTS:

### No Valediction

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH: *Songs for Eve*. Houghton Mifflin Co.

The lady in Aristophanes who complained that time isn't kind to any of us had her mind on something more visceral than poetry, but her observation applies to lyrists as well as to lovers. The perplexities that beset any good poet after fifty, like those of the middle-aged amorist, are always painful and frequently comic. So we get Pa in the Jaguar, while Junior sits at home playing at Yeats; or else we get Pa in the Teiresias manner, hardening his rhythms to suit his arteries, rasping out gnomicisms from the chimney corner. Poetry is a young Mans Mother; a Grown Mans Mistress; but of Dauid the King let the Shulamite speak. Whatever she says will be ambiguous.

These intimations of change and decay are provoked by a book which reflects neither, but which seems to be constantly afraid that it is about to do so. Even the title, *Songs for Eve*, has overtones which must be deliberate; and there are a few poems in which MacLeish is obviously trying on a couple of cerements for the fit. Thus the concluding verses of "With Age Wisdom":

Now at sixty what I see,  
Although the world is worse by far,  
Stops my heart in ecstasy.  
God, the wonders that there are!

A proper thought; yet what can it be but lack of conviction that clogs it so with blankness that it doesn't transpire? Enforced; if the poet really meant the last two lines, he could not have written them: see the end of his own "Ars Poetica," composed years ago. And yet, as I have said, it is a proper thought; and it is, of course, the impulse that drives the best of these new poems. Let us look briefly.

I am not particularly concerned with message. Certainly the paradoxes of the Eden poems which give this book its title are tame enough, or expectable enough, for usual trading. Moreover, they are largely automatic: the paradox

may stiffen a poem here and there, but there is a considerable element of sleight that doesn't quite come off. It is the sort of parlor magic that one senses in the theological masques of Robert Frost: too coarse-spun to be anything but coarse-spun. It is rather in the appended lyrics that we find what we are looking for. (Not in all of them: for, as Mr. Randall Jarrell has recently informed us, not even the Complete Works of a fine poet are wholly exempt from repetitiousness and inconsequence.) The wonders that there are: the immensity of the small; the passion that can re-create this for us:

Fish has laid her succulent eggs  
Safe in Saragossa weed  
So wound and bound that crabbed legs  
Nor clattering claws can find and feed.

Thus fish commits unto the sea  
Her infinite future and the Trade  
Blows westward toward eternity  
The universe her love has made.

But when, upon this leeward beach,  
The measureless sea journey ends  
And ball breaks open, from the breach  
A deft, gold, glossy crab extends

In ring-side ritual of self-applause  
The small ironic silence of his claws.

What I admire here, in addition to the sonal control (about which, in MacLeish's case, it is an impertinence to speak), is the connotative raying, the brilliance *in loco* even of so unpromising a trade-word as "succulent" (which is made to vibrate for the first time in its life); the multiple ways in which the saying works towards its culmination in the last two lines. I have no doubts at all about this poem. (If I could possibly have come near writing anything as good, I should probably have preferred "its," at the end, to "his"—on the "Ars Poetica" principle which I have mentioned.) It is not a riddle, or a theological paradox, or a proper statement; it is a poem that stops the heart.

And so with others: a handful in a small book, but enough to show that *Songs for Eve* is not an *ad interim* work, or a tentative premature valediction, but the MacLeish stuff itself. Grant a certain amount of vociferation, a rhetorical stridency:

voices

Blathering slanders in the house of  
State, and the obscene birds, the black,  
Indecent, dribbling, obscene birds—

which might be called fighting excrement with excrement, a messy duty for the poet who knows those black birds and knows what their obscenity means; granted, too, a technic occasionally tired, too often tinged with reminiscences of Yeats and Frost: what remains is poetry untouched by time, in spite of MacLeish's own half-confessed intimations of mortality. There is no reason yet for calling Abishag to bed.



# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume XV, Number 2

Spring, 1955

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## VERNON YOUNG:

### "Hardly a Man Is Now Alive": Monologue on a Nazi Film

You hear that the Museum of Modern Art is to show a film of the Olympic Games, made at Berlin in 1936: in two parts, for God's sake!—two afternoon sessions of an hour and forty minutes each! You ask yourself, "What's in this for me, besides the occupational compulsion of the critic to see everything? Three hours and twenty minutes of the Extrovert Ideal? Strictly for mesamorphs!"

Supervising director, Leni Riefensthal. The name rings a cracked bell: a German actress who became a Hitler favorite. Memory prods: called by some a genius, by others an upstart given credit for the achievements of her production staff. She received especially high praise from Robert Flaherty, did she not, in a footnote to an article on film-making? You're not in agreement with the Orthodox who believe in Flaherty as the Holy Ghost of that Trinity which allegedly comprises D. W. Griffith and Eisenstein as well. Still, you look up the reference. (Penguin-Pelican: *The Cinema*, 1950)—"Robert Flaherty Talking":

Hitler was a very clever fellow. . . . He spared no effort to make films and use them . . . wonderful films made by Leni Riefensthal, but terrifying like her *Triumph of the Will*. Here was a film made in 1934 in which you saw even then that the Nazis were a psychopathic case with whom to reason was impossible. But that film, which because of its revelation could have had a vital influence on subsequent events, was suppressed. . . .

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Instantly you're intrigued, if not intimidated. Whatever you think of Flaherty's place in the hierarchy of film-makers, you believe him to have been a decent, humane personality who would scarcely have extended compliments lightly to a Naziess. You can argue privately and some other day as to whether the cinematic "revelation" of Nazi psychosis would have had any influence on anything whatever. For the present you are going to see an Important Film—unquote. But two-days'-worth of the Olympic Games! The knees boggle. How documentary can you get?

Sunday afternoon and it's raining on 53rd St. Everywhere else, too. Not without misgivings, you enter the wet crush in the Museum's own bargain basement and wait among the aquatints and the lithographs with All Those Others: the Look-At-Me contingent from The Village, the earnest (heavily or mildly) boys and girls from Columbia (or N.Y.U., or C.C.N.Y., or The New School), the neutrals who pardonably just want the most from their sixty-cents'-worth of admission—and perhaps even an aging hero or heroine who competed in the Games of 1936 . . . You take a seat within reasonable distance of the door, just in case. The girl next to you opens a pocket-book edition of *The Life of the Bee*. Maybe she's smart. The houselights go down; small subtle ones come on in the ceiling. Just enough light for taking notes—if it's necessary.

*Olympia, 1936!* Part One. Martial music. The introductory credit informs you that this colossal reportage was undertaken by a horde of photographers who employed everything from pocket Leicas to telescopic lenses and took their vantage points in towers, in undergrounds pits, on wheels, in underwater compartments and in balloons (also, as you will later infer, hanging by their thumbs). Four language versions of the film were made, and two years were occupied in the cutting process . . . All right, so it's thorough. You can just bet it's going to be thorough!

The opening image is a mass of clouds or murk which the camera slowly penetrates. Boulders. Slabs of stone. A fractured landscape, withering . . . Broken columns. Weed-riven steps. A collapsed cornice.

You get the point. Greece: ruins of the Olympiad site.

Flames. A naked youth apotheosized to carry the torch in relay. Leisurely cutting, as a succession of beach-boys trots the Grecian landscape, down to the verge of the sea and then, by way of "dissolves," up through the ages. The four elements—air, earth, fire and water.

Inevitable? All the same it's pretty damned impressive. Within five minutes you're more enthralled than patient; within twenty minutes it dawns on you that if this keeps up you're seeing one of the very great cooperatively made fact films on record . . . And it keeps up.

Much of it is Siegfriedian; all of it is imposing . . . At the top of a spectacular flight of steps, a Nordic male animal lights a cauldron which is to burn throughout the Olympiad. They've placed the cauldron where the sun will set directly behind it (like Reinhardt, who timed the striking of all the clocks in town for a scene in his open-air production of *The Miracle*); and there is one stunning shot of the flames licking and consuming the molten star as it sinks: a terrifying conceit when you recall the date—1936. *Morgen die Welt!*

After the fanfares, the shots of Hitler, the panorama of flags and the release of about a million doves (what a touch!), *Olympia* gets under way; from now on you're in the hands of an excellent (if, at times, unconsciously comic) British announcer, of you don't know how many hundred cameramen as ubiquitous as Mercutio's Queen Mab, and of a film editor (or staff of them) brilliant as they come. The announcer gets his first laugh from the audience (let's agree: there's nothing sharper than a New York audience): naming the entrants for the first event, he declares cheerfully, "Another American! They keep popping up!"

Now the strategy, generally speaking, is established. Wide-angle shots of the event, the particular stage, so to speak: the stretch, the pit, the circle; move in, oversee, participate. From the total action to the detail. Whole to part; part to whole. Medium-distance shot, close-up face on, profile, low-level, overhead.

Jesse Owens' jaw-muscle tightens; a vein throbs in his temple; he swallows.

The man in the white coat (he looks like a village butcher) warns, with an upward inflection, "*Fertig!*" Runners up on their toes and fingertips. Two seconds of dry-mouthed tension. The gun goes off and the sprinters leave with a velocity suggesting they've been shot from its barrel.

The cameras do their jobs, methodically, and with unflagging variety of witness point, reporting their subject—Competition. The track event, the shot put, the discus, the hurdles, high jump, broad jump. You're overhead, underneath, running parallel, out in front, or standing by politely. Cameras pan, swivel, tilt, track or just wait. You confront the polevaulter as he begins his run, or you concentrate

on the pole's point, merely, as it goes into the ground. Or you wait and crane your neck as the vaulter comes over on top of you. Or you go up with him on a pole of your own and just grunt. And in one shot you remain focused on the pole pit, and see the action in shadow only.

Slow motion. The weight throwers bounce in an unearthly levitation, sponge-like, straining to keep their momentum from carrying them over the chalk line.

The girls take the high jump; legs almost horizontal scissor suggestively before your eyes.

Faces: Nordic, Celtic, Mediterranean, Oceanic, Asiatic. Monkey faces; dog faces; horse faces; pig faces. And bull necks.

Heads: Dolicho-, brachy- and mesocephalic.

The look of strain.

The set of determination.

The expression of surprise.

The controlled elation.

Chewed lips, knit brows; the shrug, and the faint smirk that says "Take *that!*"

The British announcer again: "It's a serious business, this putting the shot."

Tensions of the Olympics audience, intercut. Italians jump into the air, gesticulate and yell. Germans look stolid or allow themselves a quiet, triumphant tic, one side of the face at a time. Hitler grins (Germany has just won something). The German rooting section intones "*Sieg Heil*," the Japanese chant "Nish-i-da, Nish-i-da"; the French project crisply something resonant you don't quite catch; an American claque gives its rah-rah-rah, though not as intensely organized as on native ground. And somewhere in the middle of it all, a tidy group of English youngsters enunciates: "*We want you to win! We want you to win!*"

*Fertig!*

Most of the music (by Herbert Windt) sounds like Richard Strauss (even when it's good) and the rest like the Mars movement of "The Planets" suite, by Holst, most effective where it accompanies the flight of the javelins, a trembling roar and a high-pitched chord as they plunge, quivering, into the ground. The Japanese and the Filipinos look atavistic as they grasp their javelins weapon-wise—suddenly centuries (or at least oceans) removed, spearing a boar in the jungle or a seal from a hide boat.

*Sieg Heil! We are the great companions!* What do you see, Doktor Freud? *I see men and women everywhere*—mutually exclusive. The primary sexual inhibition of our time here gets conditional sanction. Never has there been so much public intrasexual hugging and kissing, as the vicarious embrace the victorious, and not all of it unconscious. A German girl, the favorite in the high jump, leaps to success, the focus of hungry female eyes, caught by the cameras with their usual impartial pertinence (or shall you say impertinent partiality?). She throws herself to the ground and is covered by a blanket; a minute later the camera pivots back as she watches her competitor. In the corner of the frame you glimpse another girl's arm moving to encircle her . . . Behind you in the theater a woman's startled voice asks, "Who's *that*?!" and her male companion answers knowingly, "Her coach, I suppose!" . . . You hear a low rumble, apparently from the sound track, which you can't quite identify in the context: premonitory, subterranean. Later you realize it was merely subterranean: the 8th Avenue subway train on its way to Jamaica, reverberating beneath the Museum's auditorium.

Night comes down over the Berlin field. The cauldron burns brightly, illuminating the hopes of thousands, heating the sinister ambition of millions . . . The pole-vaulters carry on. A record must be broken. Up and over! Hands leave the pole only at the last inch of moment, as if the pole were being gently planted, while its planter rises reluctantly to the dark sky. A weary Japanese boy shakes his head in the flickering light, resigning himself visibly to the fates before he starts his brief run; you can feel him calling up all his reserve of adrenalin. Up!—and over. Not quite! He dislodges the bar and the film audience, well in it now, expresses disappointment with a kindred groan. The British announcer says, extenuatingly, "Oh well—he must be tahd!"

Shot of empty stadium, ringed by searchlights, like a mountainous shower-curtain. Dissolve to a tolling bell, from the bell to the cauldron, from the cauldron to the flags of all nations, revolving, ascending and descending in double exposure. The Olympics flag with its linked circles. The cauldron again and smoke rising. Berlin, 1936. Trumpets.

Lights . . .

Indubitably you are still at 11 E. 53rd St. You rise, disoriented but surcharged with vicarious energy. The girl in the next seat is finishing another paragraph in *The Life of the Bee*. You wonder if

she comes here to read. Why not? Probably it's more comfortable and no more distracting than where she lives . . . Swaggering from the auditorium, you take the stairs to the street floor, three at a time, potentially invincible. You consider inspecting the authentic Japanese house which has been reassembled in the Museum's garden, but the consideration is short-lived; your Sagittarian impulses resent being Librafied. Corrupted by kinesis, you want nothing so much as to broad-jump the pond or to polevault over the garden railings into the middle of 54th St. You telephone a friend with whom you're to have dinner. You ask him if he has any liniment.

*Second day.* No rain but the streets are damp. The quiescence of the Japanese house seems more appealing—the uncluttered life . . . The Museum theater is not as full and the Monday audience has a more distinct air of professional curiosity. The Bee-girl is not in attendance. Perhaps she has resumed her studies in the more cavernous privacy of the Radio City Music Hall.

*Olympia*, Part II, is clearly the object of more artifice than Part I. Reportage is giving way further to poetry. . . . The opening is pastoral: a Siegfried idyll or an ode to matutinal joy. Dawn; beetle on a dewy leaf and birds caroling. No Disneyizing. No editorial comment. The camera speaks, unaided . . . The houses sleep. Only the lawn sprinklers are active. Contracted sun-rays splinter, making crosses and stars in the interstices of the trees, and a lone youth lopes through the woods. The community stirs itself—not yet to compete but to limber. Men shadow-box, relax their necks, kick soccer-balls, walk with ludicrous short steps, raising their knees high, like herons. Others merely have their calves massaged while they lie smiling at the sun. Even the Germans look happy. The girls enact similar prologues but since on the whole they are less attractive, clouds and sunbeams are wisely superimposed on the montage.

The stadium fills again; the preliminary exhibition is an unstinting display of *Kultur*. This is gymkhana with a vengeance. Battalions of German man- and womanhood (but you can barely tell women from men without a program) perform a joyless if intrepid ceremony of calisthenics. They leapfrog leather-bound horses and indulge in tendon-pulling feats of skill on horizontal bars, evoking every moment an intent if unintentional political myth: tempting the precarious balance, straddling the pit, suspended cruciform in mid-air with horizontal arms clutching iron rings. The women distend their thigh



muscles, clench their jaws, knot their biceps, split themselves through the pelvis, as if to see how far they can submit their femininity to the test of rupture . . . Hitler smiles. (He's got doves in his gloves).

International rivalry is resumed, and the swimming matches are as fleet, as breathtaking, as anxiously observed by the omnipresent and nimble cameras as everything else . . . With the high-diving event, objectivity falters; the provocation for a sortie of expressionism was too strong. At this point, Fraulein Riefensthal or whoever must have decided, with sweeping disregard for the nominal subject, "To hell with the Olympics! Let's just make a glorious movie!" . . . Shots, low-level and diagonal, of a diver impelled from the springboard, hinging in air against a sun-edged cloud. Cross-cut to another. Increase of pace by cutting the duration of each shot. The sequence becomes a fantasia of springing divers, outlined against the chiaroscuro sky, "not to eat, not for love" but only diving. You no longer know or care who is diving for what team or with what score. Surely these flexed and soaring figures are meant to poise themselves, step tiptoe, bounce, jack-knife, twist in half gainers, spiral, swallow-flight and swan eternally, with trumpets to herald their abrupt ascent and their plummeting fall. The camera as Wagner? Yet more to the point of analogy you are reminded, by way of Malraux, of the clay models of divers Tintoretto used from which to paint his cloud-borne angels.

After hours (or should you say miles of footage) at a nervously dynamic *presto*, modified only by intermitted snatches of slow-motion, an *allegro moderato*, nautical, sets in with the yacht races on the Kiel canal. In order to preserve the necessary ratio of tension, since to the eye a racing sail-boat has a totally different rhythm of suspense from a running man, a zooming javelin or a bounding diver, the camera's witness point and the tempo of the cutting are artfully manipulated. As the boats veer into the wind around the buoys with gunwales almost under, you move in suddenly to get the vertigo sensation of a slumping list to port and glimpse the quick action of hand-over-hand hauling or a scramble for the tiller; and in one magnificent head-on shot, with a convoluting wave in the foreground, the victor's bow rights on a swell to perpendicular and the spinnaker sail bellies out like a triumphal banner, beautiful and strange as a sea-born flower.

There is no breaking of stride in this cinematic ingenuity. Still Aquarius-bound, you are next parallel with and abreast of the shell-racers, whose brief, synchronous, exacting efforts compose one of the most rhythmically exciting effects in the world of organized sport.

Here you can only guess, wildly, how some of the shots were obtained, for during one explosive sequence you are in a half-dozen boats within fewer seconds, each time squarely confronted by a faceless coxswain with a megaphone strapped over his mouth like a gas-mask, yelling "Strokel" in six different languages! . . . Surely this is the climax, you hope, since you are by now solicitous of the film editor's ability to keep this material going with sustained interest. You need not be. After this, the cross-country bicycle grind, the appalling steeple-chases and that punishing trial of versatility, the Decathlon, captured in a walkaway by a prodigy from California, Glen Morris—now a name in a sports almanac (after an inglorious interlude as one of Hollywood's Tarzans).

Not the least remarkable job of photography (again challenging your credulity and your inferences) is the exhausting marathon, cross-country, where, in one instance, you conclude that the cameraman is either sitting on the contestant's shoulders, like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, or is spying from a low-flying balloon that casts no shadow. (Nothing would surprise you; Abel Gance, a French film director, once tied his camera to the tail of a "runaway" horse!). But in this case the plausible (and more prosaic) explanation is that the runner (the plodder) was followed by a car from which a camera was suspended from a boom over his head. (This is your guess and you're stuck with it). Anyway it's uncomfortably astonishing to look down and see those feet as close as if they were your own, lifted up and set down in a grueling battle against fatigue and spots before the eyes. You wonder if he felt like a donkey, with the carrot above instead of beyond his reach. Or was he past feeling anything but the unyielding ground and the cruelly receding finish line?

The Finale involves more swirling flags, the stadium in a long shot and again the tolling bell . . . . . *Never send to know—*

Well, what *have* you seen? A documentary record of the Olympic Games—it says here. You can do better than that. The organization of a life-force made into art by the collaboration of sensitive instruments . . . But as you leave the auditorium you overhear a skeptic saying, "With all those cameras, you couldn't miss!" The hell you couldn't and the hell they don't! Try to find an equal five minutes in the billion feet you've seen of Fox Movietone, Pathé and Paramount: The Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat of the World. You saw nothing like this. *Olympia*, 1936 is not a newsreel; it is history,

aestheticized. And what else? For the hindsight implications are rampant while you smoke your cigarette among the lithographs once more. Berlin, 1936—made possible by Berlin, 1934—the Reichstag. The flames rise as they'd risen before and would again: 1939, 1941, 1945 . . .

The participants. What happened to *them*? Where are they now—the ones who didn't play Tarzan or who didn't survive to cherish the fallen arch, the fatted calf, the varicose vein? *By brooks too broad for leaping?* . . . All that prowess and mindless agility. The gratuitous beauty of keeping fit. Two thousand sets of coordinated muscles dedicated to an exhibitionism where victory (apart from the scoreboard) is so often a collapse, a speechless gasp or an ugly convulsion, like a parody of sexual ecstasy; where the reward is a wreath of myrtle placed on the brows, in this case by the Reichsführer's Rhine-maidens, in khaki with overseas caps. *Sieg Heil! Allons enfants! Of Thee I Sing!* Images of humanism disporting not only for national aggrandizement but also for the edification of a piece of human filth who will subsequently break their limbs on the beaches of Normandy, bury their torsos under the leaves of the Ardennes, splinter their javelins on the coasts of Italy, shatter their swan-dives over the fires of Kiel. *Pro patria mori.*

The massive folly of the physical. Organized athletics, a perennial structure for collectivizing the beautiful, the belligerent and the hollow; valid symphony of and for Hydra, and pandemic rationale of the third sex for whom, like Whitman, life can be verified only by the smell of sweat from a million armpits . . .

All the same, you've seen a great movie, and you wonder whatever happened to Loki Riefensthal. (*The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?*) Did Adolf the Hammer ever realize that *Olympia*, 1936 was an act of treason? The redemption of the adrenal cortex by the creative eye? The vindication of mass by perspective?

The aim was to win. The Americans won—that is, the contest. But Germany won, too. You've just seen the winner: a lyric wrested from the enemies of the lyrical.

*The bust outlasts the citadel* . . . . . Sometimes.

Outside the Museum it's raining again.

# JASCHA KESSLER:

## Fat Aaron and the Night Rider

### I

Fat Aaron was a bloated angel. This is what the mothers called him, winking that smile about things you weren't supposed to know. Mothers, aunts, they would have been sweetly right to put it this way—you couldn't be supposed to know yet. Then, their secret might have washed down safe with coffee and buttered rolls; then, their innocent suns would have careered unswerving and unspotted above the summer, neat and simple over the rolling haymeadows, golden with birdsong and buzzing clover, in that good morning reserved for children since the night Adam covered Eve, children who are set apart romping in an idyll, still growing quiet as appleblossoms in spring.

In such dumb warm August nights the Holstein bull over the next hill bellowed black and white through the hours of that teeming darkness; he rattled the steel chain ringed in his mist-snorting muzzle, and the clanking links of his celibate bondage rang through the roar that yearned out of the pink giant skin bags swollen between his shanks, and burst from the organ pipes of his heaving chest, thundering over the valley to rattle the boards of the sleeping barns. The fields seethed with chirruping crickets, the heavens dripped meteor milk, there! there! there! A hot wind rushed up from the panting earth; flowers, berrybushes, wheatstalks of grass burst their skins; the ground reeked with the rank musk, juice and scents from the wrestling bodies and mixed sweat of things. In such nights you squatted round the gloam of a weenyroast fire as the spuds pulsed idol eyes hot in the ruined embers of a jungle temple, looking up at those bombinating skies, humming songs, and dabbling fingers with freckled brown girls whose mouths were fruit, moss their hair, and their downy arms baskets to cradle your soft melon head. While far below on the porches of the clumped cottages the mothers miched over cards and tea, or strolled the road where their flashlights glimmered like squids' eyes beneath a hot sea.

And yet, there I was, in that August, untaught, a rough boy camping on screes in the shabby tents of childhood among the stone mountains of a no land. I had trekked out willynily from Egypt

with all its wealth. I had escaped that plentiful slavery of old Nile's beastheaded wizards; my garden memory was a starveling now: palaces and towers, those cities of daisies and barley where we played with blocks, gathering straw to make the bricks to make the temples and tombs—Rameses, Luxor, Heliopolis, Pithom, Thebes—distant now, fading hieroglyphs the sands in their whorling drifts scrabbled away. And the new scrolls, inscribed with new chronicles and new behests of blood and tears, my clumsy hands could not unwind nor my shaggy eyes read. Though there was a black thunderhead beckoning in the dog days, and an arm of stuttering fire by night, there was no voice in that furious music. Until I heard Fat Aaron's. And I knew he was to be the arcane, masterful rabbin of this season.

Fat Aaron was the bakery man. He delivered to the bungalow colonies. About eight in the morning the truck would bounce, bang, hurtle up the driveway, that sassy horn tooting, and skid along to a rest as if it had no brakes and no driver. The women would collect at the back. Then he trundled out of the cab, puffing and heaving, pawing and pinching his way through them to the doors. Once at his station he dispensed breads, rye and pumpernickel and wholewheat and white, sticky jellybuns, cinnamon buns and cupcakes. They dribbled from his fat fingers into the paperbags, the endlessly fluttering doves of dough miraculous with each sweep of the arms. And like the greatest of Magi palming the eggs of milk and honey, he kept up his pudder all the while, with every bagful a daub of smut. The long rolls called saltsticks he called "pacifiers," or "Wednesday husbands"; cherries in the pie he said were gathered from the hotels clustered around Swan Lake; and the plain burnt sugar drynuttet coffeecake was "Ol' Sarah."

I never heard enough of the pitch to quite make sense from the outside, and I was never allowed to push through the harem of housecoats. There were the heads all pressed together, pronged with those big aluminum curling pins, from among which the gray tendrils of cigarette smoke threaded up into the clear mountain morning. I'd hear his mumbling treble mutter. They would knee each other in their blueveined thighs, wallop one another's loose rumps, and screech with laughter. He was giggling too, burbling rather; the chortle foamed out of his lungs, and coughed through the tight fat channel of his throat as if they were tickling him. And, though their ringed hands, their strong bonyknuckled, longnailed, fishchopping, meat-slapping, carrotscraping, redpainted fingers picked at and patted and poked him, could he have felt anything through that blubber massed

on his breast which curved under his arms from his broad back, rolling to settle over the lead vat of his vast belly? When they had their day's bread the knot broke; each went clopping back in her slippers to her bungalow for breakfast, grinning. Sometimes one raised a word of raucous warning that Fat Aaron had had for another across the grounds: "Sadie! If you can't sleep, don't try to beat it. Go see the big specialist down at the bakery!" At which a chorus of chokes and sniggles racketed through the screendoors from half a dozen coffeemugs.

I puzzled about Fat Aaron's being a bloated angel. He weighed three hundred pounds. He had the whitest lily skin, a great round head of golden curls, moist lips, cupid lips of wet pink, and downy cheeks red as McIntoshes. His skin was so white and smooth, white as the flour on his white baker's trousers. A cherub without wings I might glimpse in him, but not a seraph. Not pure, refined from all sensuality, a mature specimen of any of the host, not one of the thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues or powers. But even cherubic there was something terrible about him. Not the fatness, though he was like those chubby hovering infants, with their gold heads and disingenuous expression: not baby, yet not adult—and you noticed their things even if they were angelic boys. They were more naked somehow than the grand naked women sprawling on velvet, more naked than a holy fat child in its mother's lap. Maybe it was his blue eyes, chunks of lake ice they were; maybe the frizzled cigarette burning always in his mouth of sharp white teeth.

## II

It was near twelve Sunday night. The town still woke. Busses and cars yapped south to the city; happy people rested in the juices of the flesh were driving to the week's sweltering work. The prison gates of the rancid theater grated shut at my back and I stood in the dusty threshold of Main Street. The ache of murder was in me: my heart lusted after payrolls and molls. Warner Brothers had marked me a snarling four-reel con; my eyes were gorged with blood, my nose pulped, cheeks and skull scarred by pistolwhippings, my feet dragged the irons of a spirit brought to book. I took desperate bearings for our cottage and cut out of town.

Then, climbing the sharp hill that led my way home, I came into the cold native air blowing from the stars. Where the last sidewalks gave out, the last houses were humped snoring shadows. I stepped

onto the westering macadam road for the two miles. A young moon floated at the end of it, just above the dark world's edge. It was the sire of the Holsteins, the wonderful metallised horns of the father of bulls, who cropped whole forests in his grazing meditation. The thin arc of the young moon was a boomerang brandished by the hunter of king kangaroo, who was stalking into the long Pacific combers of the night sky, the last of the aboriginal pride. It was a Viking galley; the road unrolled towards it, wavering over a blue tundra, the track upon which the wolfpelted plunderer marched. The young crescent was the mythological brow of the silver queen: the grassroot congress of katydids fiddled her virtues night long, the cottontails mumbled praises as they munched their silver salads, the owls swooped on silver fieldmice for her sport, and in deference to her virgin nudeness most creatures dropped their eyes and slept.

I topped the rise and glanced good midnight to the town sputtering out below. A truck careened past me going downhill like the yellow ghost of a comet. It was the Manna Bakery's. I turned and walked after it. There was a crossroads a few blocks back where the bakery loomed; when I came to it the truck was parked for lading against the sliding doors. I sidled up to them and stuck my nose through to get a look at the plant.

The air inside was hot moist and delicious with the aroma of baking dough: hot poppyseed, hot sesame, nuts, nutmeg and ginger, cinnamon and cloves. At the near end were tables loaded with baking trays; on the floor the great wicker baskets were lined up, some already filled with breads and heaped rolls. In the center of the vaulted room there were grouped the mixing machines, coated with flour dust, all rumbling and churning, their pronged steel arms plunged in steel cauldrons of golden batter, revolving this way and that, backward and forward and around. Far down was the bank of roaring gas ovens, and their attendant, Fat Aaron.

He was the only one there. He was ladling loaves out of the black maws of his ovens with a twentyfoot pole. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to the bulging elbows; a linen apron stained with the stiff goo of white icing, splattered with chocolate and the blood of tarts, draped from his neck to his ankles like a white caftan. He was monumentally brisk. A dozen breads at one scoop came out on the tongue as he stepped back, balancing his staff, and tipped them into a basket. After some hundred, he clanged the last little door to and turned around. He walked deliberately to me as far as the center of the hall, holding the long heavy shovel lightly upright in his right hand, and stopped mid the

cluster of his thumping dancing machines, where he planted the regal ash of his baker's sceptre. His left arm swung out to invite me in. He smiled. In his high reedy voice he laughed, "Sholom, sonny! Come into the ark of my tabernacle."

He wagged a derisive wrist at the ceiling. "There's nobody else here tonight to keep me company but the living god: Baal-Berith, the lord of cookies and cupcakes; Baal-zebub, the lord of leavened loaves; Baal-phegor, the lord of the little broken hardon. Adonai must be lonely; he needs quiff to keep him company. You should have brought a girlie with you. We'd have tickled some cunny juice from her: that makes good cake."

The batter had begun to thicken; he adjusted the mixers to a slower stroke. I was set to filling a tray with cupcake paper. After a while he switched off one of the machines; when he pressed another button the arm drew up out of the sucking yellow stuff in the vat.

"Take a taste of this," he said as he stroked the vanes of the beater. Batter dripped from them and diffused in the rest of the mixture. I ran my thumb over an edge. I said it was good, and it was better actually than after it was baked.

"Dropped from heaven," he sighed modestly, lolling a pious head to one shoulder.

"What's in it, vanilla?"

"Sure, sonny. Vanilla, and a little flour, and some scraping off the floor; ten pounds of butter, a squirt of machine oil, and a little spit." He giggled at the expression on my face. "You don't believe? The baker's spit is good: the breath of life, the smoke of ruach, like God's in the mouth of the gingerbread Adam." He hawked, and spat a nicotined glob into a pot still on the mix.

"Come here and hold this sack." He handed me a long cone-shaped linen bag which had a wooden nipple at the apex. I held it spread open; he tipped the cauldron and poured the stiff batter into the open end, shoving it over with his palm. Then he slipped a ring over the gathered ends and knotted them. The whole sack went under his arm like a suckinpig to market. As I laid out the paper molds, he squeezed the dough through the nipple with pressure from his arm against the sack as it rested on his hip, and with two fingers flipped each gobbet neatly into a cup.

We worked fast. "What about the icing?" I asked when we were done.

"It's already made for this batch. Next time, sonny, you'll help. You're young and pure. It's a boy's sweet seed I need for icing."



That makes it good!" He squealed, drumming his belly.

I helped him load the baskets of bread into the pungent truck, and we went off full gun. Fat Aaron drove with his belly, so tight did that girth press into the wheel. One arm lazed out the window, the other was dropped comfortingly on my shoulders: the roads were his, he did as he pleased. The Manna truck had been so tinkered with, the muffler magnified the blast of each cylinder's stroke, groaning and boiling on the upgrades with a monstrous catarrh, and letting off slobbish dysenteric grenades as it zoomed down slopes. The nightly passage of this dragon through fifty miles of countryside was wanton; it expressed the joyous contempt and abandon of the driver who plied the gas-pedal of the highballing thing. The slipstream dragged sparks from the cigarette in his mouth. He handed me one from his shirt-pocket and I lit it from the tip of his.

He said, "This is one of the beautiful facts of life. You don't know enough to like it. You're still a kid, cabbage is the leaf of your heart. Look at you, you're skinny with innocence. But me, I deliver the staff of life, I'm round on all sides, white bread and dark bread and nutty dough."

I laughed at him. He pulled over and stopped on the peak of the spur of Walnut Mountain. "And here's another fact." He drew a bottle of whiskey from under his seat, drank, and passed it to me. "It might burn at first, but drink it."

It seared; I swallowed bravely each time he urged me. We walked to the edge of the road. "Look at that country," he said. "Soon it's going to be all yours; but you won't like it."

"It looks all right to me," I said.

"Yes, from here that quilt looks like a bed of delights. But once you get down there for a good whiff it's all small, it crawls with scurrying sucking people. They're vampires."

I didn't say anything. From that height I made nothing of it. Yes, a bed, heaped and various, of hummocks and pastures and glacier-rolled valleys, stands of trees under starlight like patches of black broccoli, ponds and lakes where there was darkness visible, and simple scattered blocks of guileless habitation. What could he see, I wondered, in that lambent void which was to my vision mere massy landscape?

He drank and continued, "Look over there. Swan Lake. We'll drive to the hotels, The President, The Ambassador, The Swan Lake. That's a world chock full of girlies. The lights are still on in their rooms. You know what they do all night? They dance and they

swizzle. They stand by the windows naked, and they comb their hair and look at the stars. Lovely. What I see in those bully buildings you couldn't imagine. Let's go, sonny."

I leaped to my saddle in the truck and he squeezed in behind the wheel once more. The road coasted around the south end of the lapping waters of Swan Lake and descended between ranks of maples and poplars. We ran down and turned into a gravel strip that led to the rear of The President. Most of the windows, line over line for five stories, were dark. We lugged several baskets into the quiet kitchen. In the vague light the long galvanized tables gleamed dimly. The stoves and sinks and dishwashing machines were empty, quite dead; the floor was a holystoned spotless deck. Only an old white tom hissed, stretched himself, and shuffled away.

While Fat Aaron scribbled the bill, I went outside to look around again. The buildings seemed asleep; there was no life of the night to be seen. I strained to see something. There, it might have been the glimmer of a languorous form; no, there, what I thought was a lifted arm and the nubile ivory of a breast, a delicate hand caressing the rondure of a young belly. No. Yet they must be there behind the bluey sheets of glass; any moment a shade would roll generously up, or a ripple of cuddled laughter would sound. But the night brought only the sough of summer through foliage, the clunk of rowboats against the little wooden wharves a hundred yards off.

We stopped at The Ambassador, The Swan Lake. We delivered orders. Fat Aaron whispered of what he'd seen just the night before; he pinched me and prophesied wonders. And, yes, there were some lights, there were momentary insignificant shadows that moved in rooms; there were some murmurous voices, the tinkle of a dropped tumbler, gushes of water in hidden plumbing; but no music, none of the promised cries of ecstasy, no noises of pleasure at all.

Each time he came from the kitchens he asked me what I'd seen, and I shrugged in disappointment. "It's there," he insisted, "you're blind, sonny. The world is too cunning for you." His eyes brimmed conviction as he flapped pictures with his obscene magical fingers. "But wait, we'll go up to Miriam's at White Lake. She keeps the gold calf. I'll show you what's what."

By that time my brains were flaring. We bowled along in the skies, plunging and rearing with the contours of the earth. Fat Aaron cursed and laughed and sang words I couldn't distinguish in queer tunes that never were, and he made the truck skitter at sixty miles an hour.

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Then we were there. I stepped down in front of an old foursquare frame building sided over to simulate logs. It was a tavern backed by the lake: The Harvest Moon. About a dozen cars were parked off under the trees. Inside, the lanterns over the bar were dimmed; the front door was locked, but the lights on the second floor glowed through drawn blinds, and a jazzy hullabaloo was blaring upstairs.

He rattled the door. No one came. He kicked it, and sent me to hold down the horn of the truck. Finally, a shape appeared and moved along the bar. "Miriam," he whispered. The door was opened to us. They grappled on the sill. In a bassoon throat as deep as his was high she boomed out, "Angel cake! I thought I'd have to have a party without you. Come on in, virgin, you're on time; the joint's jumping. . . . Who's the man of the world?"

"Sonny? I was shorthanded tonight, so I snatched him from his pisspot of a mother. He's pimply, but he looks already at home with that bottle."

"Doesn't he stare!" she rumbled, and, latching hold of my ear, yanked me to her. "What a sweet present, Aaron: a ladyfinger."

Miriam, cased in green satin, bangles and bracelets of gold on her arms, loops and rods of gold freighting her ears, was as big and as fat as Fat Aaron himself. Her hair was an auburn mane: without pins or curls, it parted from the middle of her brow and cascaded to her shoulders where it fell as it wished over her bare arms, down her back, and down the freckled expanse of two breathing monadnock breasts. She crushed my head between them and I smelled the thick richness of the living body of an orchard. But when she bent her head to kiss me, it blew a west wind of gin.

The stairs climbed to a posh parlor beneath whose scarlet ceiling clouds swayed of a strange sweet smoke. In the center of the room an ivory babygrand was surrounded by clubchairs in which a trombone, a clarinet, a sax, and a trumpet slouched. They made music that no leg or heart ever beat to. I slumped in a couch.

There was a throng in the house who drifted in and out of the music joined head to knees in a kissing sigh. Like smoke they came and they went; doors banged down halls; there was singing, laughter, men growled and shouted, women shrilled in delight, in pain, in anger; there were muffled chants such as I'd never heard, though human voices made them. And the music played on and on, slow and cavernous, so slow it barely moved, or whipping, looping in the eyes so swift it dazzled like sheet lightning in the muggy glow of

the room. The buzzing place was rank with the writhing and kicking of naked ruddy arms and legs.

Suddenly the trumpet flourished a clarion fanfare. I was yanked to my feet by a hand of long nails and rings twisted in my hair, and dragged to a ring where I swayed between the hips of two tall women whose arms were hot around me. The music had stopped. Then, with lonely hooched chords it began again.

Knees dipped, arms wagging loose before them, their bellies grinding and bumping, Fat Aaron and Miriam snaked to the center of the circle. Their faces shone by sweat; their eyes blank and orbled, they approached, gyred, retreated. The music stepped up its rhythm and the crowd clapped and stamped in time, shouting, "Go! Go! Go it!" The dancers thumped their backsides, bumped stomachs, swivelled, pressed and bumped, faster and faster. At the moaning climax their hands grasped each other's hair, the auburn and the gold. I joined in as the chorus yelled, "Go! Go! Go!" and I heard his whinny and her contralto laughter sounding over the music.

### III

I knew in my stupor that I was back in the truck, running through mists. As we farewelled for dawn, simple years of prince and princess crowded cheering to the banks of childhood. I was aware of the wet road, the cool dripping gray trees and the dank fernery past which we rushed. He said nothing all the way. When the truck slowed on the last hill I stumbled from it with a loaf of bread under my arm. It never stopped, and as it picked up speed Fat Aaron's pinkwhite arm fumbled out and slammed the door shut. With a last sneering blat of exhaust, it disappeared over the russet crest of the hill into the jubilee of dawn.

I stood on the shoulder of the road breathing the dew-washed day. Rank upon rank of air in light, grain in the fields glinting against the first shafts of the fresh sun and rippling in the blue breeze, the grapes bunched from the green arbors, swallows barrelling over the treetops, the hawks spread in the upper skies. As I walked down to the colony across the wet lawn to the white cottage, the sun shone full hurrah for victory. So this was Canaan! The green flesh of the world, that solemn land, was mine.

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# SANFORD EDELSTEIN:

## Two Fairy Tales

### I

You awake      Princess      to a new life  
 an hundred years have passed      but they  
 do not matter      you have before you  
 flowers      flowers      a world full of  
 flowers

It is as it should be      the  
 fairy in each tale must wand her way  
 toward a happy conclusion      but nothing  
 was begun      nothing has happened      the  
 cook continues beating the boy      the  
 girl continues plucking the chicken      O  
 eternal feathers

Take your prince by  
 the hand      abandon your tower      go down  
 to the throne room      kiss the King  
 greet the palace

But do not close  
 your eyes in your bliss      do not rely on  
 twelve wise women      on their magic powers  
 for wherever you go      Briar Rose      Briar  
 Rose      the thirteenth witch and your  
 red blood follow

### II

All tales begin on a high mountain      near  
 the edge of a forest      where the foxes and  
 hares say good night to each other      but  
 who knows their secret language      dry straw  
 in the night      a golden memory in the  
 morning

All tales begin      (do not be  
 deceived by the evil forest)      the transformed  
 delicious cottage      (was it once straw

who perfected such spinning) is always  
balanced on the peak of a mountain

You

are tempted now at home among diamonds  
to set forth on another adventure but if  
someone stops you (your own new witch  
some prehistoric goblin) and politely  
asks you "Where are you going" scatter  
crumbs on the path let the animals eat  
them for you have seen (when all  
tales are cooing) a dove on the chimney  
and the white cat of morning

## Poem

The commodities of the world fall  
into six categories food love  
clothing and shelter I cannot  
remember the fifth and sixth

But

the house was cold this cold December  
morning as if this semblance  
of shelter were only a myth

Last

year's clothing is sprinkled with  
moth holes this negation of  
clothing this trial by freezing  
is nearer to myth

The toast was

burnt the butter rancid and  
love love sang in the hurdy-gurdy  
my chattering monkey danced to its  
sex

The commodities of the world  
fell with Adam the resplendent  
surface of a wormy fruit

Death

is for sale to the lowest bidder  
and life life comes sixth

# ELEANOR ROSS TAYLOR:

## Goodbye Family

The sounds I hear from the evening chambers  
 Stanch my breath.  
 Whether I sit alone in the parlor or whether  
 Ladies crack nuts and ice cubes there,  
 I hear the tiptoeing and the banging of heads  
 And my breath grows short, for fear  
 Of what I am doing there  
 Clanging and pacing in the rooms to come.  
 For *hate you* cut the friendly nerve  
 That let my lover shrug;  
 My stare froze down the only warmth  
 Another had, all her own;  
 Every year I dug and moved the peonies  
 Longing to bloom fat and chemically  
 By the well slab, ingrown.  
 Every day I opened the drawer  
 And inspected the knives:  
 Were there enough, sharp enough, for all lives?  
 The years to climb!  
 The walls to catch at!  
 To cut free and drop through the cloak closet  
 And cellar would be better—  
 Under the foundations of God's world  
 Swimming on my side, ear on shoulder, eyes unlettered,  
 And intellectuality an angle  
 Marking the area of obesity—  
 Frail fathead!  
 It's no use God's whistling  
 "Come back, Fido, come back,  
 I won't tease any more";  
 He shan't catch me again.  
 I'm in the glade  
 Remembering  
 I meant to tell my daughter—  
 I looked for you a cattail  
 But they were all silked out—;

And now the water  
 Meeting me around the curve  
 Roaring, blanks out all but ear;  
     Not in the day time, not in the dark time  
     Will my voice cut and my poison puff  
     My treasures of flesh,  
     My gems of flashing translucent spirit,  
     Nor my caress shatter  
     Them.

## Araminta Dunlap, 1870

When I disrobed to go to bed  
 It seemed to me like something said:  
 Hold your shimmy round you tight  
 Somebody may be around tonight  
 Ain't no curtain, ain't no shade  
 Don't hurt none to be afraid—  
 Little David McSwain!

Walked us both home from the dance  
 Wearing new black homespun pants  
 When we got up to the door  
 Caught us both around the waist  
 And—kissed us! Lor!  
 What's he getting—kisses! from us for?  
 Little David McSwain!

. . . .

When Dave got up and struck a light  
 We'd neither of us slept a mite,  
 Been up and down with Tish all night  
 Out of my mind for fear she might  
 Go off like little Dave. They say  
 "Don't fret . . . another on the way. . . ."  
 They know I favor this least child.  
 No need to cry, I said. But while  
 I made a fire in the kitchen stove  
 I heard a pesky mourning dove.  
 Lor! What's he calling "O-love" for?



## Wind

From the moment Gabriella died  
 At an exhausted, nightless morning time,  
 There began a knifestruck disattendance  
 In any place she might have chanced to be,  
 Even in places properly mine—  
 In my bedroom, at my fireside—  
 That made me rise at once and leave a room  
 Whenever her formal blank came in to me;  
 The one last-minute dry-pen silence drew  
 A steady, regretful, cancelling line through  
 All my blotted teas.  
 There was nothing to talk about,  
 And it was no use looking for anything,  
 In the cupboards, or out the door.  
 Long ago, something had eaten out my viscera,  
 And I was hungry, now, for years before.  
 My flaxseed-meal aunts touched my arm:  
 "Faith holds no room for such alarm—"  
 But the wind of a suddenly-turned season,  
 Hard, and raw enough to move a solid shadow,  
 Began in flaws to rush the outer closures  
 And wheedle through the inner apertures,  
 Calling together broken flowered cups  
 And uncommunicative inked-out reasons,  
 Recalling whistling losses that had hinged  
 On cheese toast and the cats' meals after meals;  
 I even felt my agonies in my cradle,  
 Alone, in the dark back bedroom, revealed  
 In the wind, fighting the oaks, seizing life just so.  
 In the wind's seizure I saw her  
 Trudging barefoot and mudfouled  
 Over the clay she was born of,  
 Fighting the clay with strength grown bodywise,  
 And wherever the dreamy, cultivated part of her had fled to—  
 It was not in her ghost, nervous, human eyes  
 I kept seeing.  
 Gabriella, howl!

# JAMES B. HALL:

## How to Make the Poem

Now a good job  
 Wants the prime and vicious timbers  
 With no gum, gnarl, or piss-eyed grain  
 Giving purchase when an ungreased axle  
 Grinds smoke from the hub's core,  
 In these times of winter;  
 So with the spokeshave and the auger's  
 Crafty tongue, contrive or warp  
 This oak: by fire blown on steel  
 And the hulked anvil heel

Center hub and spoke  
 Inside a rim's hot comprehension,  
 And look now, Brother, at this wheel:  
 She tracks in thresher's dust and through the mire  
 Of pigs, or weathers only in a barnyard  
 Reviled by sparrows.  
 No matter, that stuff stood in these woods,  
 Suckled by roots sunk through the old debris  
 Of glaciers, grew by connivance with this sun,  
 And so I think she'll hold.

But moment is place only,  
 This birth by word or spoke the same  
 As flint's revenge upon some sullen log  
 Scraped in fire to make canoes of war:  
 Mound Builder, Shawnee, what of your cries  
 Which named the sun  
 Towards morning. Therefore take me, tusk's  
 Destruction, adze edge, or even martin's  
 Hacking wing: crush me wheel, your maker,  
 Into this drift of meadow.

# RALPH ROBIN:

## I Speak for Scissors Grinders

A lady heard my bell  
 (I speak as a scissors grinder  
 With an old stone on my shoulder  
 Of the sort to be turned by foot).  
 She wished me well.

I wished she had been kinder  
 To all her knives grown older  
 Of the sort to be honed by hand.

## Built So

They kept a store for selling blood  
 And bone (five of a name)  
 Surly and high. I did

What I had to do and bought  
 On time  
 Members that did not fit.

I marked them with a pencil point  
 But reamed them with a spinal reamer  
 And let the pencil marks grow faint.

I marked them with a pencil point  
 And cut them with a willful brace,  
 Accurately bolted every joint  
 To serve my fame.

## RICHARD G. STERN:

### Good Morrow, Swine

The doors swung open and a small, grey-haired man strode to the platform, jumped the two steps and slammed his briefcase on the desk. The class rose and called, "A good morrow to thee, Mistair Perkins."

"Good morrow, swine," said Mr. Perkins.

The class sat down. Mr. Perkins unhooked a yardstick from the blackboard, raised it as high as he could and slammed it on the desk.

"Vun," called the class and, to the yardstick's slash, "two, tree, four five, seeks, seven, hate, hate prime, ten."

When the counting finished, Le Quillec raised his hand. "Alleviations of ze bowel, sair."

"Pity," said Mr. Perkins and waved Le Quillec from the room.

Mr. Perkins scratched his nose and the class divided into two groups which spaced themselves single file at opposite sides of the room. Mr. Perkins took a child's coloring book from his briefcase and held it before the first boy in Group One. The boy examined the picture of a massive turtle.

"Igle," he said.

"Precisely," said Mr. Perkins and he called for the translation of "Igle" from the first boy in Group Two.

"*La tortue*," was the response.

"Acceptable fiction," said Mr. Perkins, turning the page. The picture was of a boy feeding sugar to a horse.

"I forgets," said the second boy in Group One, and he held out his palm, which Mr. Perkins slapped with the yardstick.

"Ze lovair," called the third boy, and the translation from across the room was, "*Le cheval*."

Group Two triumphed, eleven to eight.

"Conquerors up," called Mr. Perkins. "Massachusetts."

Group One went down on its hands and knees and Group Two leaped over the desks first to straddle the Conquered and then to reassemble in a circle around the podium in the front of the room.

"Pang," went the yardstick.

"Vun," called the prostrate Conquered.

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Boots stamping, heads jerking, the Conquerors raced around the podium shrieking, "Oodirtydad, oodirtydad, oodirtydad, oodirtydad."

"Vun, two tree, vun two tree, vun two tree, vun two tree," pounded the prostrate Conquered.

"Pang," went the yardstick and the Conquerors froze, arms extended, sweat tickling their stillness.

"Massachusetts," said Mr. Perkins, "a bloody state," and the class resumed their seats.

"Ahgony of ze bladduh," called Rigobert, the smallest of all the boys.

"Your sentence, Rigobert," said Mr. Perkins.

Clutching his right side, Rigobert recited, "Shane ze catuhpilluh, sad my oncle, so hees weengs cahnt grau. . . ."

"Mangle the coral and its blood will show," finished Mr. Perkins and he waited for the translation.

"*Quand on lit trop vite, on n'entend rien.* Shockespierre."

Rigobert bowed and left the room, passing Le Quillec on guard at the door.

"Sentence, Pinot," said Mr. Perkins to a pale, fattish boy in the first row.

"Ze barbair scrimed and waved ze bloody shears," and before Mr. Perkins could add the coupling line, Pinot went proudly on with "Tinking ze infant's blood its mudder's tears. *Le mal est aisé, le bien presque unique.* Calvin Coolitch."

He drew back quickly, just dodging Mr. Perkins' spit.

"Arrogant whoremaster," said Mr. Perkins and he walked slowly to the windows and looked out. "The minor villainies are weighed with the major, my dears. Look at the sky, *la terre*," and he indicated the rows of bare trees along the banks of the hidden river with the yardstick while the class followed the motion, wide-eyed and silent. "It's made up of a trillion tentacles which, each minute, draw up our villainies to the heavens, *l'enfer*, and drop them into the destined receptacles of our blood. And, one day, our lives, *nos erreurs*, are gathered up, the vats overflow, and the sky runs with our blood." The yardstick arched slowly down to the dusty planks and Mr. Perkins walked back to the desk.

"Strethman," he called.

A rickety form rose, trembling, in the back row.

"Strethman, yqu look ravishable today. Hast thee on a new frock?" Mr. Perkins was quivering.

"Sair?" asked Strethman softly. He fingered his old brown sweater and shrank back towards his seat.

Mr. Perkins waved him down with a gesture of blessing. Strethman sat and put his head on top of his crossed arms.

"*Il pleut, monsieur*," called the class.

"There are times for weeping as for mirth, times for fronting, times for birth," chanted Mr. Perkins, and he walked back to Strethman and pulled his hair till the weeping stopped. "A new elegance today, my dears," he said, walking to the blackboard.

He printed, "A child's tears are the devil's pearls. *Le coeur pleut quand les vices triomphent*. Waldo Emerson."

"We will violate the vision drop by drop. *Nous répéterons la phrase mot à mot*."

Mr. Perkins led the class through the sentence. They repeated it individually and in small groups. He assigned the English to the Conquerors and the translation to the Conquered and the class chanted in round fashion, Mr. Perkins guiding the repeats and phrasings with the yardstick.

"Ze bahbee's tairs are ze davel's pairls. *Le coeur pleut quand les vices triomphent*. Valdo Emairso."

When the bell rang, there was instant silence on the words "tairs-vices." Mr. Perkins erased the blackboard, took up his briefcase and said, "Pleasant dreams, swine."

"Pleasant dreams, sair," called the class on their feet.

They continued to call "Pleasant dreams" until Mr. Perkins disappeared down the hall on the way to his next class.

# JACK MATTHEWS:

## The Antique Dealers

When he was in Pittsburgh Kirkendall often stayed overnight at the Flaschmanns' large brownstone mansion. The old couple irritated him somewhat, but he felt that it was eminently practical to stay there. Otto Flaschmann had mentioned one day in his downtown office that since virtually all of Kirkendall's dealings were with him he might as well stay at his place overnight, and they could talk business there. Otto was looking more fragile and older than ever and he liked to stay at home as much as possible where he was merely another, larger piece of Dresden.

And Kirkendall saw him now, as he was ushered into the front room, as an image refracted and confused with others. Kirkendall blew cold air and vitality into the room, and shook his coat off dynamically as if to stir things into reality. But Flaschmann's little, immaculately-tailored form only quivered infinitesimally. Finally he lent him a slight, liver-spotted hand and spoke out in a somewhat louder voice than one would expect.

"And how are antiques?" Otto asked.

"Business is only fair, Otto," Kirkendall said, glancing at the mirror above the mantel (both antiques) which reflected porcelain, jade, polished mahogany. . . . Kirkendall was struck by the peculiarity of this inevitable preface of Flaschmann's. As if the old man had to say "antiques." He could say "things" or "they." It was obvious that this fellow could conceive of nothing *but* antiques; or the antique business, which was a different matter, slightly. He could see the old man in his dressing robe, digging into a poached egg at breakfast and at the same time greeting his wife with, "And how are antiques?"

"Those things you sold me last spring," Kirkendall was saying, "didn't do *too* well. You know, glass is common now and my contact in Rochester—you know Bridges—came up with almost the same stuff. Glass, glass, glass." Kirkendall was suddenly aware that his voice was going on without him.

"And how is the Mrs., Otto?"

"She's a great deal better since the last time you saw her." The firm voice refocused the elusive image of Flaschmann for a moment,

and Kirkendall was nodding his head with an attentive look. ". . . and as long as she doesn't—you know—try to do too much, why the doctor says that she'll be all right and that she'll probably live to be a hundred."

That'll give her another year, Kirkendall thought to himself, and he wished there'd been someone there he could have whispered that witticism to. But now his eyes were caught by a set of figurines on a small, marble-topped utility table near the sliding doors. Flaschmann's eyes, which looked a little glazed, didn't seem to notice whether he was listening or not, so after a bit Kirkendall fell completely to gazing at the figurines and wondering about them. The voice continued to recite about its wife's health, and, now and then, about antiques, with a kind of noble assertiveness in the great room, and for a distracting second, Kirkendall thought of a class in Rhetoric that he'd had in military school many years back. But mostly he was absorbed in reverie. The scene was Rochester, and he was toying with Bridges, who on the last trip had mentioned wanting very much just such a set of figurines as those on the marble-top table.

"Uh, pardon me, Otto, but I think I might have a buyer for those figurines over there if you'd want to part with them."

For an instant there seemed to be a flush of confusion on Flaschmann's face. Kirkendall wondered what the matter was; after all, he'd frequently dropped a hint about something in the old man's house and bought it right then and there. The old man was anything but sensitive where business was concerned. Besides he seemed to have an inexhaustible storehouse some place; nothing taken ever left a vacancy. Once Kirkendall had bought a Queen Anne chair and an end table right from this very room, and when he'd returned the next time the room had either been rearranged slightly or the table and chair had been subtly replaced, for Kirkendall couldn't remember where they had been, precisely, and the room seemed more cluttered than ever.

Flaschmann had regained his stare and recited, "You mean that eighteenth-century dancing pair?"

"Uh-huh. It's pretty interesting, and I might be able to get rid of it. Would you like cash for it?" It somehow appeared that Kirkendall was about to do the little man a rare service.

"Gee, I always kind of liked that," Flaschmann said with startling ingenuousness.

"Gee," Kirkendall repeated to himself. "Second childhood? Does



the old boy have maybe a marble collection?"

The look of confusion had returned, partially. Kirkendall reached into his billfold and pulled out a fifty-dollar bill. He sensed something painful in the situation, but he was a bit unsure of his part in it. "I'll give you fifty, Otto. I might get sixty, maybe sixty-five, on the other hand I may not get rid of it."

"I know, I know," said Otto, who knew the risks of the antique business, but who hadn't had a sufficient grasp of the current prices for several years now.

It's a miracle he's been able to hang onto his inheritance, let alone make a little money, Kirkendall thought. And, too, he thought that he was reasonably sure of getting at least a hundred and twenty out of the pair, but he subverted that consideration since it was imperative that he at least temporarily believe what he was saying. Besides, he might keep them for himself.

Through superior inertia, psychologically speaking, Kirkendall got the pair, although he went to fifty-five for them. Having triumphed over an essentially unworthy adversary, he sat back and lighted a king-size cigarette. He performed the ritual of the great-first-puff and regarded the fine little figure deposited in the opposite chair. He was surprised, and a bit offended, to realize suddenly that Flaschmann was looking downright lugubrious. Damn bad sport. And where's the Mrs.? He jerked his leg nervously for a few seconds and turned his mind toward Bridges in Rochester.

Mrs. Flaschmann came shortly after that and they had coffee and rolls. She had the same physical stamp as her husband, generally, with minor variations. Kirkendall always detected the same bleak and brittle expression upon which were played the unconvincing routines of courtesy. And with the Mrs.' coming, it became once more apparent to Kirkendall that his situation with them was actually inverted. It was as if he were the absentee landlord, or perhaps the host, for the odd, myopic little couple simply waited expectantly when Kirkendall came, as if *he* were supposed to act and *they* to follow.

And, of course, it always came about that he did precisely that. This evening he commenced fumbling among some old piano rolls that the Flaschmanns had brought over from Germany in 1928. Kirkendall was not at all insensitive to "serious music." In general, he inclined toward those classics which were emotional and large rather than subtle and sinewy. The Flaschmanns, on the other hand, were astonishingly ignorant of the whole business. They didn't know

who came first, Brahms or Beethoven. It was strange, too, because they had in the large cabinet he was now fishing in at least sixty or seventy rolls of very good things. And Kirkendall had heard them say that they played them often and, what's more, he could tell by their general appearance that this was so.

Kirkendall found a Chopin, a Saint-Saens and several others that appealed to him at the moment, and, after putting the Chopin on, he relaxed with a cigarette. The Saint-Saens label was quite worn, but Kirkendall was suddenly struck by something on it. His back was mostly turned from the old couple, at the moment, so without their being able to see he brought the roll up next to his face and studied it intently. But all he could make out, definitely, was part of the "Charles" and, of course, the "Camille Saint-Saens." And yet this was enough to set him thinking. He had read, or heard, within the past few years of some piano rolls that had been made from the playing of the great man himself and which had just (at the time of his reading or hearing of it) been discovered. Obviously, they were of inestimable value, except in terms of dollars, and the number of dollars such a rarity brought must have been prodigious, he reflected. He detected a date on the roll, too: 1912. Could it be authentic?

He played the roll, and indeed it was magnificent. "Inspired" was the word that presented itself to Kirkendall's consciousness for use in describing the experience in the future.

"Rather remarkable," he said with the tone of a jaded man being slightly stirred into half-susceptivity. He wasn't sure if the Flaschmanns heard him, for they simply sat there, unseeing, with their hands identically laid upon the respective arms of their chairs.

Shortly thereafter Kirkendall excused himself, and, at the same time, asked a not-unusual favor: to use the phone for a long-distance call. (He always paid immediately.) He retreated into the hall, pulling the slide doors to after him (the house was drafty) and placed his call for Philadelphia. Fortunately, connections were made immediately.

Flaschmann was lighting the large gas burner beneath the mantel when Kirkendall sliced himself back through the heavy oak doors. The old man tottered upright, and settled in his chair.

"Thank you, Otto dear," his wife said, and Kirkendall, as he sat down, was confused by a certain radiance in her voice and look. Then he realized that he couldn't cheat them on a deal like this. It wasn't that he hated them secretly. Maybe he despised the old man

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now and then, but that was because there was something so unreal about him. Both of them were remote, and even intangible. And this bothered Kirkendall. They were a conduit that led out of his experience into a land which was strange and barren. Like a tundra where there is nothing but wind and space, except the thousands of little flowers that crop up incomprehensibly during the quick summer. All of his other contacts—Bridges, Benjamin, Forest—were integers, objects. They were things he could touch with finality and significance on his semi-annual circuit. They were like bases in a ballpark which Kirkendall could touch with his foot as he sped around the infield—progressing and counting as he passed them. But Flaschmann was a base some crazy person had thought of after the game was over—when the ballpark was dark and quiet; a base which was there and yet which wasn't there; which if a person tried to touch might prove to be not there, causing the person to hurl himself into the vacancy of a darkened left field, beyond which there was no wall.

But Kirkendall was in command of himself when he settled back in the pneumatic leather chair and tapped a new cigarette on his silver case. He smacked his lips, and stirred, and—as he raised the match to the cigarette, with his face contorted around the object—he said, "That was Benjamin I was just talking to."

"Oh?" said Flaschmann. "How is Benjamin?"

"Okay. I thought you might have something in that Saint-Saens roll. You know Saint-Saens was alive when that was made?"

"Oh, was he really?" Mrs. Flaschmann said. "Well, that roll has an interesting history for us, hasn't it, Dear?"

Flaschmann said yes, but rather quietly, as if he didn't want Kirkendall to hear. And after he said it he stared at Kirkendall without bothering to explain what that history was. Mrs. Flaschmann was smiling to herself, and looking at the backs of her nails.

"What was his name, Otto?" she said finally. "He was a Spaniard," she said to Kirkendall, as if that explained everything.

"Carlos Bessira," the old man said with the intonation of a reverent historian reciting a Truly Great Name.

"Yes. That's it," she said. "Well, we knew him in Berlin. Otto had known him for several years, and he was there making piano rolls in 1912. And this roll," she said, pointing with her hand shaking toward the cabinet, the piano and the rolls on the bench, "this roll was the first one manufactured from his playing."

"That's right," Otto said. And he walked over and put it on to play again.

Kirkendall sat there meditatively, smoking and blinking at his body sprawled before. "You know, I thought maybe Saint-Saens had made that roll himself. He did make some rolls, you know."

"Oh, dear no," Mrs. Flaschmann said. "Is that why you called Mr. Benjamin?" She was smiling.

Kirkendall nodded and laughed. He felt uncomfortable.

Otto was gazing at him serenely with (could it be?) a twinkle hovering in his eyes.

Kirkendall fussed about his room for fifteen minutes or so, examining this and that, before crawling up into the giant bed. The bed had a strawy, crisp quality to it which reminded him of a bed he'd slept in at his grandmother's many years ago. Only there he'd gone to sleep with the smell of manure and hay mingling in the room, with the night breeze causing the frayed, white curtain to swim back and forth in the window.

He spent a long time staring up, with his hands folded behind his head and the cover tucked up beneath his chin. He heard the toilet down the hall flush twice, then the old house was quiet. Kirkendall listened hard, wondering if maybe he could hear a dog barking far in the distance as he used to hear at his grandmother's in the summer. But it was winter, and there were no stars in the sky. *This is a strange house. Life is a funny thing. I wonder how long Otto and the Mrs. will live. Will they be dead this time next year? Will I? I could be, even if I am young. How many rooms in this house?*

He closed his eyes hard, and little lights cascaded inward from the tight lids. He rolled and fretted, and finally slept.

The next morning they had oatmeal, poached eggs, toast and coffee, and while the Mrs. helped the maid clean up, Otto and Kirkendall went into the front room. A wind had risen during the night, and there were big, wild slaps of rain hitting the window. Kirkendall walked over and looked out to see if his car (which he hadn't put in the garage last night) was okay. It was glistening and black, parked there beneath the skinny, bare trees, and Kirkendall had a recurring sense of competence. It was a nice car. It would be a rough drive up to Erie, then to Rochester.

"This is a massive place you have here, Otto," Kirkendall said suddenly, as he turned from the large window.

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The old man, dressed nattily in a tweed suit this morning, nodded and smiled. "We like the old house," he said.

But the image of Flaschmann faded and became diffused like something printed from a runny negative, and Kirkendall hovered, interested, above an odd table near the front window he'd been looking out of. A cat stirred somewhere near his left foot and gazed up at him, unblinking. Kirkendall stared at the animal meditatively and withdrew a cigarette. What was it about this place that—in spite of himself—was so rich and deep? Kirkendall once again felt the urge to probe a depth here and there. Was the old man sleeping again, with his eyes open on him? He lighted the cigarette with both hands cupped stiffly before his face. Then, swimming in smoke, he looked around him with a peculiar opacity in his eyes. Something caught his attention, and he strode over the cat, and past a bookcase, and began fondling a heavy, embroidered kind of portiere that had caught his eye once the night before.

During the next March both Otto and Kirkendall lost their wives. Mrs. Flaschmann died quietly, leaving Otto wandering fitfully around the old house. Kirkendall's childless wife left him suddenly one night, and he, to fill the gap, took in a bachelor-girl friend named Stella Reeb. He took her with him on his next Eastern jaunt that summer.

It was a hot, muggy day when he swung his car down through the open gateway to the Flaschmann estate. Kirkendall saw the slight figure of Otto hovering in the garden beside the two-storey garage. He remembered Otto saying that he would trust the grounds to the gardener, but never the vegetable garden; and Mrs. Flaschmann had laughed in the possessive way women have about their men's idiosyncrasies. How was Otto making out without his Mrs.?

Kirkendall jerked the car to a nodding stop, and jumped out to open the door for Stella. She emerged, tall and straight, and gazed loftily at the approaching figure of Otto—dressed in surplus army pants and a faded blue "T" shirt. She was a flat-chested young woman of twenty-eight or nine with a gorgeous mass of jet-black hair piled high on her head. Her skin was pasty and powdery, and the contours of her face were perfect, symmetrical and unexciting. The dark glasses she wore against the sun gave her a peculiarly cadaverous expression.

"Hello, Otto," Kirkendall said solemnly and sympathetically. He grasped the old man's hand.

"Hello," Otto said, and his eyes twitched behind his glasses. There

was a slight pause while Kirkendall looked soberly into the old man's face and Otto blinked uncertainly. Finally, he said, "How are antiques?"

Kirkendall didn't answer, but introduced Stella to him. She commiserated with him briefly and they all walked to the open back porch.

Otto leaned in the back door and asked the cook to make some lemonade for the lady and get some beer for Kirkendall and himself. They sat there talking until the muggy air began to break up into leisurely currents of breeze and the tops of the high elms began to nod. There was a summer storm coming on and already the great nimbus had begun to unfold over them, low and exhilarating.

After the preliminary condolences they had avoided the talk of Mrs. Flaschmann's death. Otto and Kirkendall had talked under a facade of laziness, of antiques, the garden, politics, while Stella sat far down in her chair chain-smoking cigarettes and sipping at her lemonade. She hardly looked at the men beside her. It was Kirkendall who was yawning, not Stella. She had a kind of intensity set in her face. And, of course, Otto was rambling. But there was one thing—obvious in a way—that Otto said which shocked Kirkendall terribly. He said it right before they left, and Kirkendall was actually sick at his stomach when he got in the car. Not that the thing itself was terribly strange; it was just that Otto had said it; and with such an awful, unnatural intensity in his face and voice; and with tears swelling up viscid and refractory behind his glasses.

He said, "It's a terrible, terrible thing, Kirkendall. You'll never understand; never. I sometimes curse the arrangement of things that could make life so hateful."

And then they left. Kirkendall, agitated and driving fast, and Stella brooding and chain-smoking. Does Otto disapprove of God on moral grounds? Or does he just miss the problem by disapproving, not of God, but of "providence"? Either alternative seems to contradict Otto's nature.

The storm was a real cloudburst. The rain thudded heavily on their car, and within ten minutes the sewers were overflowing. The windshield wipers hissed and strained, and Kirkendall was slowed to second gear. Twice they had to stop until the flood of gray-green water had subsided. A half hour after the last stop they were well into the country. The stillness of the air was broken only by the sibilance of the car wheels on the wet tar road and the sound of

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thunder playing with the lightning on the mountains. It was that vast, hollow dusk that succeeds the summer shower and both Kirkendall and Stella were abashed by it.

That night they stayed at a motel. Kirkendall tried to read for a while before going to bed, but he got restless and finally had to join Stella, who was sitting outside gazing beyond an advertising sign at the dark, massive body of a mountain. They sat there until eleven o'clock, silent, and watching the scud of fracto-nimbus that streaked the moon and night sky.

In the middle of the night Kirkendall dreamed of Otto. He dreamed that he was back in the freight station that he had worked in as a younger man. He recalled vividly the redolence of the place: the stale smell of the old floor, the yellow lights, the rumbling of the hand-trucks, the incessant moan of the old motor that brought the belt out of the basement and tumbled the packages down a waxed chute for the men to grab and throw. And amidst the racks of heavily piled packages and the men and the trucks—amidst all of this activity he recalled the tiny, bent figure of an old man weaving unsteadily to some incomprehensible destination. Somehow this strange old man had become Otto; but he looked much older—so ancient and fragile. His great hooked nose almost touched the chin and his eyes were bleary. It seemed that he was carrying an unbelievable burden, although he might have been just looking for the toilet. Incredibly forlorn and pathetic he wandered uncertainly among the men and massive objects that surrounded him. Even though it was Otto, it was Otto metamorphosed into the shape and looks of that other old man. There were no glasses to occlude the dreariness in those eyes. Would he be run down by a truck? Kirkendall became frantic, because the little old man was lost and helpless. He quivered and tottered against a rack when someone brushed him. They couldn't see him; or they didn't care. One was as bad as the other. The roar of the trucks became unbearable, and someone was ringing a bell and there was much shouting. Old man's drop was suspended from his nose and his bent little frame was shaking like a used-up filament.

Kirkendall couldn't stand it any longer. He left the place he was working at and struggled—tried to run—to his side. Wasn't anyone going to save him? He knew that if the old man wasn't actually in any trouble, or even not there, he would appear ridiculous, but Kirkendall couldn't restrain himself. And there were suddenly a vast number of trucks and canvas tubs in the way. Kirkendall was

beating himself against them like a moth against a light bulb. He was weeping now, and bruised. All he really wanted to do was to go up to him and say, "Hello, little father," and lead him out of this terrible, gross place. Perhaps, outside, the Mrs. might be standing—forever young and buxom—and she could lead the old man home, if he didn't disappear too soon. The tears were flooding from his face now.

In an instant he was transferred from the yellow arena of pain to the dark room. His head was buried in the pillow and his ribs were still heaving with the spasms of sobbing. He turned his head in a darting gesture to the side, and saw the thin, straight outline of Stella sitting up in bed. Although she was sitting next to him, she seemed remote and untouchable. He couldn't even hear her breathing. She was watching him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know," Kirkendall answered.

"You ought to tell me," she said.

"I know. I will. Later."

"Okay," she said. "I know how it is. Everybody has a little, hard ball of secret pain."

"That's right," Kirkendall said. "They're always so secret that you can never really talk about them."

"Poor dear!" She got out of bed. He watched her as she walked to the window and gazed out. He could see the snout of his car through the window, shining in the moonlight. She lighted a cigarette and exhaled deeply into the screen. Some bugs ticked against it uncertainly. He hoped he might be able to think more about her now; more about her mind, her soul, her heart. He hoped he would never think of Otto Flaschmann again in his whole life.

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# ROBERT HUTCHINSON:

## Young

All that there was of green was in that summer:  
 The morning's sets of haze,  
 The race to the lake before breakfast, and mountains to praise  
 The small cast, the spot-lit-green ballet  
 That surfacing, laughing, white, released to the day  
 All that our hearts could raise;

And all that there was of noon in those green hours  
 The sun ignited—  
 And all day, young and noon were the themes we tried  
 Till sun brought out the mountain black  
 In us, and green called after all the way back,  
 And wilderness crawled inside.

## In the Ward of Mercy

While I tore from the corporal's elbow  
 the last poor hanging shred of arm  
 and morning spilled apologies but stayed,

a bus gained speed from my civilian head  
 and moths in a jungle said  
 that they were human, too. Skew griefs

were interlocked there, steel flew leafward while  
 a child in Prague called Jesus, and Rome  
 came home for a drink. Only the earth to cry

for the frazzled cuff and the one loose button  
 one-time shell on its crusted heart  
 and earth shed nothing but light. Sun

went down on our midwest face, sun  
 was light where the arm had been: sun ordered  
 come away, and moths in a spiral led

us in. The civil jungle dialed us like  
a minute hand; I walked an inscribed circle,  
was halfway to home or more before

I saw him stretched like a ravaged Hermes and,  
a thread apart, at ease, what once  
paid silly praise to the sweaty face of May.

## FREDERICK BOCK:

### Cartoon: The Valet

#### 1

Too bad no one fancies the valet's mien  
But the poor whose better misery is to learn  
Between wars the right way to pack a shirt.

Beautifully precision takes no side.  
Though the dead are in his eyes, deep, deep,  
And are not blind, amazement is his slum.

#### 2

Or is not-bungling the very Ritz of complaining?  
Possibly. His mother worked rose-point lace,  
The candle guttered, there were cracks in the house.

Nevertheless, need we take him for a sea-wind  
If pride and compassion still urge him to make  
Electricity look less exact than a country man?

#### 3

Breakfast brought, he draws the landing curtains.  
His eyes look down the steps, across the parking  
Colored by tallow grasses and dog-messes,

And past antennae—to what animadversion?  
His drunken son comes home again a hero,  
His other son has mastered a similar fission.

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But how can we ring and tell the little fellow:  
 "All right, the sarcastic Novae tremble to pieces,  
 But the armpit's kissable abysm? Really, James—

Get out of here!" He doesn't like slugging in bed,  
 And we—who suffered merely the shock of green cheese  
 In the rich long ago—already live on the moon.

## Sic Transit—

Hushed are station  
 Platforms—  
 When, with one blow, blouses  
 Mute the forty motions  
 Of summer's gong and glare.

The little droll mock  
 They give back to the sun  
 Snubs its own glamour, too,  
 When just a shiver shy  
 Of being Winter's boon.

Yet where shadows mum-show  
 Redskin princesses,  
 May not the sun protest  
 Cymbals of the north  
 In tearose underslips?

Alas, that I should hear  
 How suasively the lake  
 Repeats its gold commands—  
 When louder laces pleat  
 Abandonment!

For I must say, "Poor fish—  
 Have you come to mean nothing?  
 Sink from singing  
 This infernal rustling  
 Where better farewells fare nude."

## The Jays

Before the blinded flutters of our eyes  
Mind the jaybird breaks winter in two,  
So quickened is the brightness  
Of sun and snow about us  
That we who are often lonely often use  
A shimmer for repose.

We hear, above, their bluer quartz  
Spoke light like a shout  
Exultant in our waste of hearts—  
Yet to be, bird-loose, stretched out  
Beside you is enough  
To make love love: we lie  
Like snowbanks on our warmth.

Their cries are axis-creaks of May!  
But half-turned hills of sun  
Roll back to your whiteness,  
In itself halcyon:  
Performed before us is our quietness.

Dying, the brightest of the snows,  
We feel our drifted moments vie  
With local centuries passing by  
That brought no jay upon the sill,  
    As this hour will,  
To look at you, sidewise, as we at him  
    With all our power,  
For still we live on where we die—  
Nothing changes but the flight of birds.

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# VIOLA HOPKINS:

## William Faulkner's 'The Hamlet': A Study in Meaning and Form

Rarely does one novel contain the abundance and variety of William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*: a range of style from lyricism to bathos; genial good humor alternating with corrosive irony; a series of episodes in which the tall tale nudges the love idyl and a fantasy in Satan's throne room goes hand in hand with a sombre murder story; a cast of characters, more numerous than the inhabitants of the hamlet, both witnessing and participating in a drama in which a shift of economic power has far-reaching sociological and moral implications.

Plenum, however, by itself is not sufficient to make a work of art; a cornucopia is not aesthetically pleasing unless the fruit has been arranged to form a unified composition of colors and shapes. Recent criticism<sup>1</sup> has corrected the mistake of regarding this novel merely as a collection of short stories loosely strung together "resembling beads on a string," in Malcolm Cowley's phrase, but what needs to be explored is how Faulkner has integrated his numerous motifs, moods, and styles to create a unified "composition," though not in the academic style. My purpose here is to throw some light on how meaning molds form and creates its own unity and, further, to suggest how symbolism, characterization, and humor contribute not only to thematic unity but to making *The Hamlet* a rich and dimensional major work.

Faulkner's raw material, or, in other words, the main narrative action, tells the story of the rise of Flem Snopes and his clan in Frenchman's Bend, a farm community twenty miles or so southeast of Jefferson. Ab Snopes, Flem's father, a Civil War bushwhacker and an unsuccessful horse trader reduced to tenant farming, has gained an unsavory reputation for quarreling with his landlords and then burning their barns for revenge. When the Snopeses move to Frenchman's Bend and become Will Varner's tenants, Flem uses his

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Lisca, *Faulkner Studies*, III (Spring, 1954), 5-13.

father's arsonist tendencies to blackmail Jody Varner into hiring him to work in the village store. From this vantage point, he soon gains control of all the other Varner industries and interests in the village, including the cotton gin, the blacksmith shop, the store, and many of the surrounding farms, installing in each of these enterprises one of his kinsmen as manager, worker, or tenant farmer. He completes the ravage of the village by marrying Eula Varner, a rural Helen of Troy, cheating most of the community in the famous "Spotted Horses" episode, and tricking three others with a buried gold legend into buying nearly worthless property; and, having sucked the community dry, he leaves his rodent-like relatives to haggle over the pickings while he moves on to Jefferson, where he is to become vice-president of the bank (in *Sartoris*).

From this *donnée*, Faulkner made four books, each self-contained in that expectations of a narrative nature are raised at the beginning and fulfilled by the end. That is, in the first book Flem's rise from a store clerk to the throne of a feudal domain is completed, signified by his being seen sitting in Will Varner's flour barrel chair on the jungle-choked lawn of the Old Frenchman's place; the second book ends with Eula's seduction and marriage, the point towards which her whole history has been directed; "The Long Summer" is taken up with two stories, Ike Snopes' affair with the cow and the Houston-Mink Snopes conflict, both of which are resolved, though not conclusively, by the end of this book; and the last book may be viewed as being made up of two individual but related tall tales, the "Spotted Horses" and hidden treasure episodes. Though each section has extrinsic interest, each is related through theme as well as common setting, characters, tone, and even a continuous stream of narrative action. Once the reader has accepted the fact that this is neither a strictly chronologically developed narrative in the realistic or naturalistic tradition of, say, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, nor a book in which the time has been "spatialized," to borrow Joseph Frank's term, as it has in Faulkner's earlier *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!*, and is willing to accept it on its own terms, the "form" will be seen to be adequate to the subject. As a matter of fact, *The Hamlet* is something of a "half-breed" both "old-fashioned" and "modern" in that though the story unfolds for the most part in chronological sequence, on occasion the technique of dislocating time is employed.

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Its "episodic" structure must first of all be referred to the dominant tone. Not accidentally is it entitled *The Hamlet*; we might say that its outer limits extend beyond the boundaries of Frenchman's Bend only as far as Jefferson, and the core, in the community and the novel, is Varner's crossroads store. The pace of a rural community in the 1890's is reflected in the slow, discursive movement of the novel. There is time to spend a Saturday whittling and chatting on the gallery of the village emporium. Amusements are simple and usually communal—church picnics and socials, hunting and fishing, horsetrading—but most of all, talk is the staple of entertainment. The land and the seasons are the great facts; the speech, manners, and habits of the hard-working, independent farmers determine the pitch and provide a richness of texture, a concreteness, and a fullness of life which acts as a framework to sustain the numerous sub-structures, variety of styles, and themes, which in a sparser work would seem gratuitous. It is this closeness to the "folk" (to be discussed more fully later in connection with humor), though most difficult to define specifically, which is perhaps the key to the particular individual quality and unity of this novel, if any one "key" can be isolated. It acts strongly to define the tone and technique of the novel, just as Benjy's inability to discriminate past and present time determines the form and style of the first part of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Before, however, we consider the function and effectiveness of individual "structures," we should explore the basic moral tension, which is that between the Snopeses, led by Flem, and the farmers, represented by Ratliff. Flem is the central figure of the novel; but, paradoxically, not only are most of the other characters more fully comprehended or sharply etched, but the book seems to be centered on what happens to them. He is inevitably in the background, scarcely appearing to be taking part in the action; indeed he is "offstage" in Texas for a good quarter of the book. His personality is never presented through his thoughts or feelings, and though his jaw is in perpetual motion, relentlessly grinding his nickel's worth of tobacco, he scarcely utters a word. Though the other Snopeses are highly individuated, from the proverb-spouting, teacher-lawyer, cartoon-like I.O. to the not unsympathetically portrayed, good-humored, empty-headed Eck, Flem is always presented from the outside, usually in terms of his physical appearance. Faulkner, however, makes good use of external description to suggest the man's essentially ruthless and amoral nature, as the following passage testifies:

If he [Flem] ever looked at them individually, that one [Ratliff] did not discern it—a thick squat man of no establishable age between twenty and thirty, with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth stained slightly at the corners with tobacco, and eyes the color of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk. It was as though the original nose had been left off by the original designer or craftsman and the unfinished job taken over by someone of a radically different school or perhaps by some viciously maniacal humorist or perhaps by one who had had only time to clap into the center of the face a frantic and desperate warning.<sup>2</sup>

According to Irving Howe, Flem is, "like most pure villains, hard to accept. Each step of his behavior is credible, his character an enigma."<sup>3</sup> His lack of credibility as a human being, however, seems justifiable to me in terms of his role in the novel. He is in a sense an abstraction of all the evils of the individualized Snopes and does not have to be a "person" at all. Presenting him by default, as he does, Faulkner intensifies his value as an incalculable force, a shadow that falls on all the characters and lurks in the background of all incidents. He serves as an unfocused but highly effective symbol of a pervasive, corruptive power. Not having much personality beyond his meanness and cunning, he has that same "depthless quality, like stamped tin" which characterizes Popeye, his urban counterpart in *Sanctuary*. There is, of course, more than an intimation that he is soul-less. In a brilliantly comic scene which Ratliff imagines taking place in hell, Flem bargains with the Prince of Darkness for the redemption of his soul. The Prince cannot return it to him because, though it was not very big to begin with, now it is only a "dried-up smear under one edge" of a matchbox (p. 171). Like the Judge in the "Spotted Horses" trial scene, the Prince "gives up" in the face of Flem's enormous, calm audacity and resigns his throne to him, just as earlier, though less sensationally, Varner had turned over to him his earthly sovereignty.

The invasion of the Snopeses is not to be taken as a realistic portrayal of a shift in the locus of power in the community from Varner to Snopes; with the exceptions of Mink and Ab, they are drawn too much as caricatures, and their rapid peopling of the com-

<sup>2</sup> William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York, 1940), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Irving Howe, *William Faulkner, A Critical Study* (New York, 1952), p. 63.



munity is too sleight-of-hand to be read as a true-to-life picture. It is this two-dimensional quality which the Snopeses have, in contrast with the greater depth of the rest of the characters, which makes them the more terrifying at the same time that they are the more comic. It is in fact Flem's opaqueness and his separation from the human community, symbolized by his habitual silence in a place where talk is a favorite sedentary sport, which make his "behavior"—his ability to conceive and carry out brilliant coups—credible.

Furthermore, it seems incorrect to think of Flem simply as "pure villain." His outrageousness comes from the combination of his impenetrable blandness with his genius for manipulation. In spite of his viciousness, he inspires wonder and a perverse kind of admiration because of the imaginative quality of his cunning. He is monstrous; but like Senator Joseph McCarthy in his heyday, he arouses a baffled respect for his diabolical shrewdness, good sense of timing, and daring. Even Ratliff in the short story "Centaur in Brass" mentions Flem's name "in a tone of savage and sardonic and ungrudging admiration."<sup>4</sup> In terms of the over-all structure of the book, a full and more realistic presentation of Flem's personal motivations would upset the balance and economy of the book, which is based on a negative technique. Like Milton's fallen Prince, this Satan might steal the show. In that case *The Hamlet* would no longer be a kind of tragicomic allegory of the corruption of a people, but a fictional biography or realistic study of a ruthless financial and political genius.

V. K. Ratliff is the only character in the novel who acts to defeat "snopesism," though he, too, is tricked and corrupted by avarice in the end because, unlike Flem, he is thoroughly human and hence fallible. The shrewd, humorous sewing machine agent and living newspaper of Yoknapatawpha County is the Faulkner "witness" serving an interpretative function similar to that of the Reporter in *Pylon* or the neighbors in *As I Lay Dying*. Part of the story is narrated by him; part is seen through his eyes. At times he is merely an observant spectator, sometimes a participant, and we lose him completely in the long sections dealing with Eula Varner's courtship, the idiot's love affair, and Mink's quarrel with and murder of Houston. But before each of these incidents is closed, Ratliff has become involved in the action, usually in opposition to Flem Snopes. George Marion

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<sup>4</sup> William Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York, 1950), p. 150. The sewing machine agent appears under the name Suratt.

O'Donnell's humanism-naturalism formula,<sup>8</sup> though it is an oversimplification, seems to apply here: Ratliff is certainly the chief spokesman and defendant of an ethical, humane tradition against the invasion of the Snopeses' amoral materialism.

When the Snopes clan arrives, Frenchman's Bend is a stable, almost feudal, community with its rituals and traditions. The "peasants" are under the thumb of the not very benevolent Varner. When Varner makes his annual settlement with his tenants and debtors, he is described as the "white trader" and Snopes is his "native parrot-taught headman" (p. 69). But the headman soon surpasses his teacher in exploiting his own stock. Flem upsets the feudal order and disregards the traditions and expectations of the country folk by replacing Varner's casual, unsystematized brigandage with a calculated "cost accounting" control. When he worked in the store, Jody Varner often made mistakes, usually in his own favor, but because he gave the farmers long-term credit when they needed it, they expected him to do this. Flem does not give credit and he never makes mistakes.

"You mean ain't nobody ever caught him *once* even?" [Ratliff asked.]

"No," Bookwright said. "And folks don't like it. Otherwise, how can you tell?"

"Sho," Ratliff said. "How can you?" (p. 65)

Ratliff, then, serves to unify the novel in at least two respects: in his moral opposition to snopesism and in his role as commentator. His mud-stained buckboard with his sleek "mis-matched" team is a familiar sight on the country roads as he makes his rounds through the four neighboring counties. He weaves in and out of the novel in much the same way, joining the many strands of interest and always managing to be on the scene whenever the time is ripe for an ironical judgment on the gullibility of the farmers or the machinations of the opposition.

To understand Faulkner's method better, we might briefly examine some of the episodes or "structures" which seem but loosely related to the narrative and thematic development. The long Pat Stamper horse trading story, which hinges on the blowing up of a horse by means

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<sup>8</sup> See George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing, 1951), pp. 49-62.

of an inserted bicycle tube, may interrupt the narrative action; but justification, apart from its own merit, can be found for its inclusion, and in this particular place. Ratliff tells it ostensibly to show that Ab "aint naturally mean . . . just soured" (p. 30), and Ab does indeed emerge in a different light. His meanness, his barn-burnings, and "absolutely needless violence" (p. 55) are seen to arise from despair and wounded pride as he angrily protests against his defeat. The Stamper episode, humorous as it is, was one of the first of a long line of circumstances which contributed to his defeat; but through this story the reader sees that he was once capable of affection, friendliness, and humor. In contrast, Flem appears even more depthless and inhuman, for no anecdote, human folly or passion is offered to illuminate the roots of his viciousness, except, of course, the example of Ab's failure.

Faulkner puts the episode to good use when he follows it with the scene in which, after eight years, Ratliff visits Ab. The mood changes from the genial past to the harsh present, and the colorful humor gives way to a feeling of desolation and melancholy, a variation in tone which works backward, too, throwing the humorous story into a different perspective, making it indefinably more meaningful than it is by itself.

The chicanery of the legendary Pat Stamper and his Negro companion, whose artistry in transforming broken-down mules into high-spirited animals bordered on magic, may also be viewed as a foreshadowing of the later calico horses episode in which a Snopes emerges victorious. That the latter story, no less humorous but more tragic, should be in the third person rather than the first indicates the subtlety of Faulkner's handling of these two "tall" tales. The first is retrospective and anecdotal, admittedly a story told to a circle of listeners; in the second, the "trick" has unfortunate consequences and far-reaching implications, the least difference between the two episodes being the gulling of one person as opposed to the cheating of a community.

Though the book "Eula" can be interpreted quite easily, simply in terms of the narrative structure, there is an ambiguity in the treatment of the central character which has many ramifications. The main "point" of Eula's story is that Flem has appropriated this splendid female animal, who has aroused wild hopes, dreams and passions in every male in the village from thirteen to ninety, as part of a lucrative business deal. Seduced and then deserted by one of her numerous

suitors, she is given to Flem by her father, who also pays for the two-dollar marriage licence and the train tickets for the "honeymoon" to Texas (where she is to bear the child of her lover) and turns over to him the Old Frenchman's property with a substantial sum of money. Of course, Flem has official title to her, but to her he is nothing. She calls him "the man" or "sometimes she said Mr Snopes, saying it exactly as she would have said Mr Dog" (p. 167).

In contrast to Flem's cold acquisitiveness, there is the passion of the school teacher Labove, who, according to Faulkner, would have been a monk in another age, "a militant fanatic who would have turned his uncompromising back upon the world with actual joy and gone to a desert and passed the rest of his days and nights calmly and without an instant's self-doubt battling . . . his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites" (p. 119). He turns his back on the world outside Frenchman's Bend and remains in the village because of "an eleven year old girl who, even while sitting with veiled eyes against the sun like a cat on the school steps at recess and eating a cold potato, postulated that ungirdled quality of the very goddesses in his Homer and Thucydides: of being at once corrupt and immaculate, at once virgins and the mothers of warriors and of grown men" (p. 128).

As this description of Eula suggests, she is presented from differing and sometimes unreconciled points of view. First there is the effort to identify her with woman incarnate, as Eve or Venus, the principle of fecundity itself. When Labove first sees her entering the classroom, he feels she brings "into the bleak, ill-lighted, poorly-heated room dedicated to the harsh functioning of Protestant primary education a moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus" (p. 129). Later he identifies her with the earth: "He saw it: the fine land rich and fecund and foul and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it, oblivious, drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of living seed its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the harvest he could ever hope to gather and save" (p. 135).

On one level, then, Eula symbolizes the life-giving principle on a grand scale. Elevated through repeated associations with pagan mythology, she comes to represent an elemental magnificence and grandeur. Her presence arouses bright dreams and passions; she lifts the little lost village from its obscurity and bondage to time by her kinship with the immortals—Venus, Helen, Ceres. But on the other hand

this image of a goddess is contradicted by the comically mammalian Eula forever chewing cold sweet potatoes, too lazy to do anything but sit and wait for her glands to grow. Nothing splendid in that picture! The gap between the two characterizations is bridged by the emphasis on her pure animality which is summarized by a remark made by the dry, spare, eternal bachelor Ratliff: after all she is "just meat" and "only another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race" (p. 171). Eula may be a goddess, but she, like them, is "corrupt" as well as "immaculate"—a purely physical force which destroys man's freedom and enslaves his spirit while she herself remains inviolable.

The association of the female with the land as the procreative force which condemns man to servitude is a pattern which recurs throughout the novel. Thus, Labove, though he already had "forty miles of start toward freedom and (he knew it, said it) dignity and self-respect" (p. 128), against his conscious will is "doomed" to return to the village because of Eula. Similarly, Houston cannot escape marriage to Lucy Pate. Though he flees "not from his past, but to escape his future" (p. 242), he learns after twelve years that he cannot escape either. The pattern is repeated in Mink Snopes' capitulation to the nymphomaniac in the convict lumber camp. "Even before his summons came, he was resigned to the jealousy and cognizant of his fate" (p. 272). Similarly, the land itself is a shackle which neither Houston nor Mink can free themselves from. Both flee, but both must return. Mink seeks the sea, "that iodinic proffer of space and oblivion," but he has "no intention of availing himself, would never avail himself" (p. 270) of it. Thus, this pattern of escape and return and of the land and women as life-giving and domesticating forces can be viewed as a symbolic projection of one of the conditions of human existence, the eternal struggle of the flesh against the spirit and the free will against fate. It is in this respect that the characterization of Eula has a significance, with respect to the book as a whole, that goes beyond the social and narrative levels to the ideological.

The idiot, Ike Snopes, plays a part in the ethical tension of the novel at several points which also makes him transcend his role in the plot. Early in Book I, when Ratliff confronts Flem in the store with the notes he has received from Mink, he is utterly sickened to learn of the Snopeses' exploitation of Ike, Flem's ward. Another dictum in the code of human decency has been violated because it is clear that to Flem the bonds of kinship mean nothing. Blood is *not* blood. In Ratliff's own words:

I quit too soon. I went as far as one Snopes will set fire to another Snopeses barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too. (p. 101)

The long section in Book III in which Ike pursues and escapes with Houston's cow (another example of the escape and return pattern in that section but worked out in quite a different way) is perhaps no less directly relevant to the thematic structure than the episode just mentioned, but its length and its rhapsodic style have caused some critics to feel that here Faulkner is allowing his love of language to get out of control. But first, the significance of the idiot ought to be suggested. To Ratliff, his eyes appear as if "at some instant, some second once, [they] had opened upon, been vouchsafed a glimpse of, the Gorgon-face of that primal injustice which man was not intended to look at face to face and had been blasted empty and clean forever of any thought" (p. 98). His slobbering mouth is capable of forming only one distorted word, "Ike H-mope," his own name, yet he loves and suffers. Vacant of thought and lacking the instinctive physical coordination of an animal, he emerges ironically enough through this section, because of his love for a cow, as more human than Flem Snopes or, for that matter, any others of the clan. Like Benjy, he is innocent and incorruptible.

Ike is the only Snopes, with the exception of Mink, whose point of view controls the narrative for any length of time, but unlike Faulkner's use of Benjy in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*, the point of view of the idiot here is not sustained but shifts from a vision of a world of alternating darkness and light and a swooning, unstable earth to that of the impersonal author's, especially in passages where other characters, mainly Houston or Mrs. Littlejohn, are involved in the idiot's adventure. Since Ike is only one rung above the animals on the great chain of being, the natural world is revealed through his consciousness from a fresh and unusual perspective, for to him it is granted to see natural phenomena undistorted by thought or memory or preconceived ideas and images. Thus, in contrast to the colloquial, down-to-earth style of much of the rest of the novel, this section is highly poetic in language and feeling. The poetic treatment raises the episode above the realistic level, transforming perversion into something pure and idyllic.

While the lyricism of this section has often been cited, what has

not been pointed out is the occasional note of burlesque, resembling the "Sweets of Sin" parody in the Gertie MacDowell scene in *Ulysses*, which saves it from dwindling into sentimentality. For example, after the cow has released her "fear constricted bowels" on her "lover," she scrambles away with the besotted Ike in hot pursuit. He speaks to her, "trying to tell her how this violent violation of her maiden's delicacy is no shame, since such is the very iron imperishable warp of the fabric of love" (p. 199). The lyricism may serve to spiritualize the "love affair," but the occasional ironical tone brings it back to earth and provides a distance or perspective from which to view the scene.

The aftermath of this episode also serves a function in revealing character and measuring the extent to which the Snopeses have demoralized the community. Houston, Mrs. Littlejohn, and Ratliff are sensitive to the idiot's shame and grief, and each of them acts to alleviate his pain. Houston, filled with "that furious exasperation which was not rage but savage contempt and pity for all blind flesh capable of hope and grief" (p. 215), gives Ike the cow. Mrs. Littlejohn, realizing that this cow is the only thing Ike has ever wanted, wants him to have it despite the abnormality of the relationship. Ratliff acts to have the cow taken away from the boy because his sense of "conscience" forces him to do so. He is not, perhaps, as outraged by the act itself as sickened by the men, of whom he is one, who have succumbed to the corruption of snopesism or remained passive to it. Ike's act becomes a perversion only when he is put on exhibition by his kinsman, Eck, because Ike is not entirely a human being, capable of making moral judgments. The men of the community are. Ratliff shuts up the hole in the fence and has the cow taken away because he feels he must take a stand against evil, for one of the conditions of humanity, Faulkner makes clear, is conscience as well as passion, greed, and bloodthirstiness.

The parallel patterns of escape and return and struggle against fate in the Mink Snopes-Houston stories, which occupy the rest of Book III, were suggested earlier in connection with the discussion of Eula. What is of special interest here is Faulkner's use of biography for psychological, rather than purely informational, purposes.<sup>6</sup> This is illustrated in the juxtaposition of the story of Houston's past with

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Kenneth Burke's essay "Psychology and Form," *Critiques and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. W. Stallman (New York, 1949), for this distinction and conception of form.

his murder by Mink in the present. The tone of the passage in which Houston's married life is set forth is tender, quiet and understated. This is followed by a passage in which he is shown trying to cope with his lacerating grief at his wife's death. The murder comes with an abruptness that is beautifully timed in bringing relief, terrible as it is, to the reader after his sustained identification with the painfulness of Houston's suffering. The pity that has been aroused is released just as Houston himself is severed from his anguish. Since mere description cannot convey the effect, this passage is worth quoting at length, though reproduction of the transitional passage alone makes it seem more melodramatic than it actually is when taken in the context of the whole chapter.

But sooner or later the moon would wax again. There would be nights which were almost blank ones. Yet sooner or later that silver and blanched rectangle of window would fall once more, while night waxed into night then waned from night, as it had used to fall across the two of them while they observed the old country belief that the full moon of April guaranteed the fertilising act. But now there was no body beside his own for the moon to fall upon, and nothing for another body to have lain beside his own upon. Because the cot was too narrow for that and there was only the abrupt downward sheer of inky shadow in which only the invisible hound slept, and he would lie rigid, indomitable, and panting. "I dont understand it," he would say. "I dont know why. I wont ever know why. But You cant beat me. I am as strong as You are. You cant beat me."

He was still alive when he left the saddle. He had heard the shot, then an instant later he knew he must have felt the blow before he heard it. Then the orderly sequence of time as he had known it for thirty-three years became inverted. (pp. 248-249)

Mink's murder of Houston and his subsequent attempt to escape are also related to the theme of intra-Snopes depredation and, finally, to Flem Snopes. The murder acts to differentiate character in the same way that the Ike Snopes episode did. Mink has all the characteristics of a Snopes, but he is more like Ab than like Flem. He kills Houston ostensibly because he impounded his cow but really to maintain his sense of integrity in the face of poverty and defeat just as Ab burned barns. Lump, Flem's successor at the store, not only refuses to help Mink but actually hinders his escape because of the money that he knows to have been in Houston's pocket. He cannot forgive Mink for not picking his pockets before disposing of the body. "Do



you mean to tell me you never even looked? *never even looked?*" (p. 268). When Mink is to be sent to the penitentiary for life, Flem violates the most fundamental obligation of the blood relationship by doing nothing though he could have acted to ameliorate the sentence. It is Ratliff who looks after Mink's wife and children while he awaits trial in the Jefferson jail.

The last book, "The Peasants," could be subtitled "Flem Snopes' Mopping-Up Operations," for the action of Book I is continued here and brought to a climax. Having returned from Texas with a string of wild horses, Flem is prepared to put through his biggest business deal to date; the sale of the spotted horses is the crowning achievement of his career in Frenchman's Bend. Underlying the humor, and inextricably a part of it, are the violence, pain, and injustice which are the inevitable results of a completely successful "practical" joke. Mrs. Tull talks away her only means of redress for her grievances, and Mrs. Armstid's claim for her five dollars is overruled by the sworn testimony of Lump Snopes. Henry Armstid goes completely mad as he compulsively digs for non-existent gold on the worthless property he has mortgaged his farm to buy. And, of course, no one can prove that Flem owned the horses though everyone knows he did, nor can Bookwright, Ratliff, and Armstid convict him of fraud. In terms of the ethical tension of the novel, corruption has triumphed over rational morality. Having duped all of the men of the countryside except Ratliff (and Tull) into buying a calico horse, Flem tricked him into buying the worthless Frenchman's property by playing on his very human greediness and love for the "science and pastime of skullduggery" (p. 94). Flem may not have designed to cheat Ratliff specifically. Anyone willing to be caught would have satisfied him. But Flem has the Prince of Darkness on his side so that it *has* to be Ratliff who falls into the trap. He is fated to be caught just as Labove must return to the village and Houston must marry Lucy Pate.

Important to the thematic organization of the novel are a number of contrasts and parallels which have been touched on before but not developed. Ike's passion for the goddess cow ironically balances Flem's loveless marriage to Eula, the fertility goddess, who is mammalian and placidly bovine. The idiot, however, successfully abducts the cow, even though he loses her after their brief "affair." Flem acquires Eula permanently, but she never belongs to him. She is, in relation to Flem, as wooden as the toy cow, an effigy of his real one, that was given to Ike. Also, the tone of serenity and devotion which pervades the

passages in which Houston's marriage is described contrasts not only with the aridity of Flem and Eula's relationship, but also with the passionate but ghost-ridden love Mink bears for his wife.

Nature symbolism is an important means by which the humanistic-naturalistic conflict is projected. The farmers have a respectful but easy familiarity with trees, birds, and weather. In their sane moments, as for example in the following passage when the subdued men are escorting Varner to the Littlejohn's to examine the injured Henry Armstid, they are responsive to their natural environment.

They moved on to the gate and into the road again. "Well, it's a good bright cool night for running them." The moon was now high overhead, a pearled and mazy yawn in the soft sky, the ultimate ends of which rolled onward, whorl on whorl, beyond the pale stars and by pale stars surrounded. They walked in a close clump, tramping their shadows into the road's mild dust, blotting the shadows of the burgeoning trees which soared, trunk branch and twig against the pale sky, delicate and finely thinned. They passed the dark store. Then the pear tree came in sight. It rose in mazed and silver immobility like exploding snow; the mockingbird still sang in it. "Look at that tree," Varner said. "It ought to make this year, sho." (p. 350)

During the heat and tumult of the horse auction and its aftermath, there were refreshing glimpses of the same pear tree in "full and frosty bloom" (p. 316), its serene beauty mocking the human comedy taking place on the vacant lot. The blooming plant or tree is frequently associated with the humane in other ways: Ratliff after a long illness is described as "thin . . . the smooth brown of his face not pallid but merely a few shades lighter, cleaner looking; emanating in fact a sort of delicate robustness like some hardy odorless infrequent woodland plant blooming into the actual heel of winter's snow" (p. 78).

The Snopeses, on the other hand, rather than being in sympathetic harmony with the natural world, are presented as a sub-human species who merge with the "lower" orders. Flem is "froglike" and has the "predatory nose" of a hawk (p. 59). There is a hint of the snake about him, too, in that he wears rubber-soled tennis shoes which muffle the sound of his footsteps, and his squatness is emphasized. Even his name "Flem" has the unpleasant meaning of "mucus" and suggests something sluggish and oozing. In combination, we are given the impression of a heavy-bodied, full-bellied reptile creeping silently in the dust, an image which is in keeping with his identification with Satan.

Flem is "heeled by a dog," Lump, who has the "bright, alert, amoral eyes of a squirrel or a chipmunk" (p. 165). Ratliff calls him that "Snopes encore" and tells how he was so ashamed and horrified by his given name "Launcelot" that he gladly accepted "Lump" in its place (pp. 225-226). The slippery, rodent-faced I.O. has the "weasel-like quality of existing independent of his clothing" (p. 73). Eck is not referred to in animal terms, perhaps because he is good-natured and likeable, even if he is a Snopes, but he is also definitely sub-human. His "open, equable face" begins "less than an inch below his hairline" (p. 71). Since he apparently does not have enough room for his brains to mobilize the nerves even for muscular activities, he is clumsy and incompetent at tasks which require nothing but brute strength and minimal dexterity.

To complete the menagerie: Eck's son, Wallstreet Panic, has "periwinkle" eyes; Saint Elmo, the candy gorger, is compared to a rat, and the idiot is bovine. Mink's given name places him without a doubt in this zoo. Ab's two girls are at first likened to "two enormous birds . . . the last survivors of a lost species" and then to two "tremendous cows" (p. 54). The Snopeses as a whole resemble locusts in their ravage of the village.

Cleanliness is also used as an index to character though it cannot be applied too rigidly. Ratliff, Bookwright, Tull and the other farmers wear "perfectly clean" or "absolutely clean" faded and darned shirts and overalls. This is stressed as if to suggest that there is something to the old adage that "cleanliness" is next to "godliness." In contrast, Flem's new white shirt is streaked with dust on Monday and becomes progressively dirtier as the week passes. Lump appears in the hamlet wearing the same kind of dirty white shirt and dingy gray trousers. Jody's ceremonial black broadcloth suit and collarless white shirt, which he wears all year round, are soiled and unpressed. Ab Snopes wears a black frock coat, green with age.

Though *The Hamlet* is admittedly discursive in plot development, this does not mean that the incidents have not been skilfully worked out and arranged even in terms of plot relationships. For example, when the novel first opens, the reader learns that Will Varner sits on the lawn of the gutted shell of the Frenchman's mansion to get an idea of how it must feel to need all that "just to eat and sleep in" (p. 7). The first book concludes with the picture of Flem sitting in the flour barrel throne. Varner, in the first part, tells Ratliff that this property is the only thing he ever bought that he could not sell to

anyone. Ratliff is thereby convinced of its value; his faith in Varner's shrewdness is so deep that he never doubts that "Uncle Will" has deliberately not sold it because the land has secret assets. This makes it plausible that Ratliff should fall prey to Flem's trick in the last book, for he is prepared to believe that treasure has been buried there, and the reader has known the basis for his assumption from the first.<sup>7</sup> There is symmetry, then, since the novel begins at the site of the mansion and ends with Flem Snopes, having purposely detoured to see Henry Armstid digging for gold, riding past it on his way to Jefferson. The pride and dream of the Frenchman was "dust with the lost dust of his anonymous bones" (p. 4) even before Flem's ownership. But Flem exploits the last trace of the Frenchman's legend, which had been reduced to the stubborn tale of buried money, before he leaves for Jefferson.

Another example of careful, if not "tight," plot construction is the handling of the Houston-Mink Snopes story. Houston and his handsome thoroughbred dog are introduced early in the first book. Shortly after his first visit to the new blacksmith's shop, he and Mink quarrel about Mink's yearling which trespassed on his land. Ratliff, witnessing the argument, observes that here is a different kind of Snopes, "like a cotton-mouth is a different kind of snake" (p. 104). In the first part of "The Long Summer" the quarrel comes to a head. The result of the hearing in the village store is that Mink must pay Houston three dollars for the return of his cow. This leads to the shooting, which takes place in the middle of the same section. Ironically, in the preceding chapter, Houston had given his own cow to Ike Snopes. In the last section of this third book, Mink's background is given. Ratliff's prognostication that he is different from the rest is fulfilled. In Snopes' final flight, Houston's faithful hound becomes almost mythical, an avenging hound of hell, as he pursues the murderer down the old log road.

That Labove has left his teaching job abruptly is mentioned in Book I though he actually does so in Book II. He foresees Eula's marriage to a "crippled Vulcan." Ratliff's fear, hinted at throughout the latter part of Book III and Book IV, that Flem will not come to Mink's aid, is realized in the courtroom scene, which follows the hearings against the Snopeses after the "Spotted Horses" episode. In

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<sup>7</sup> Irving Howe seems to have overlooked this preparation for Ratliff's gullibility when he cited this incident as inconsistent with Ratliff's character.

all three cases, Flem's absence is more significant than his presence could possibly be. It can be seen from these examples that seemingly disparate incidents are both logically connected and thematically related. These violations of strict chronology and the cross references serve, moreover, to give a sense of immediateness and verisimilitude.

Humor, of all qualities the most difficult to define and most liable to suffer by abstraction from its context, is the blood and bones of *The Hamlet*. The spectacularly humorous incidents, the Pat Stamper-Ab Snopes horse swapping, the dialogue in which Flem Snopes worsts the devil, are not merely exceptional excursions from the sober main line of the narrative. The very backbone of the book, the author's voice, or call it his style or his individuality, is an ironically humorous view of life which supports every incident and gives each a function in the body proper.

Within the novel, humor is the means by which the characters find it possible to face the terror and pain of living. Ratliff has the "nicest" sense of humor coupled with the most acute sense of morality. He is utterly baffled into silence on one occasion by the enormity of one of Flem Snopes' offenses, but he usually releases his outrage through a humorously vocal appraisal of the situation. Similarly, Houston's "sardonic humor" is "indomitable and unconquerable above even the ruthless grief" (p. 216). The one who is the least discomfited by the Snopeses is Will Varner, who is "shrewd secret and merry, of a Rabelaisian turn of mind" (p. 6).

Not only does a sense of humor provide a defence mechanism or safety valve for the characters who face the harsh facts of life, but Faulkner implies that life itself is a horrifying and even senseless joke. Varner, "not frowning but with a sort of fierce risibility," remarks to Ratliff, as they walk over to Mrs. Littlejohn's where Henry Armstid writhes in pain, "Breathing is a sight-draft dated yesterday" (p. 353). Though this idea ("life on borrowed time") is a commonplace, the remark, coming as it does from Varner, sane and illusionless, Ratliff's spiritual father,<sup>8</sup> is significant. It makes explicit what is demonstrated by the disposition of characters and conflicts in the novel. Life at best is a precarious business. The God who determines man's

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<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that Faulkner meant to suggest this surrogate father-son relationship. Ratliff "was a good deal nearer his [Varner's] son in spirit and intellect and physical appearance too than any of his own get" (p. 180).

destiny is, to use Houston's words, a "prime maniacal Risibility" (p. 215). As Robert Penn Warren noted, "Distortions of humor and distortions of horror in Faulkner's work are often closely akin and frequently, in a given instance, can scarcely be disentangled."<sup>9</sup>

Though the philosophical implications of Faulkner's humor transcend national boundaries, the extravagance of his humor belongs to a peculiarly American tradition. The indebtedness of *The Hamlet* to the tall tale and Western humor in general has often been pointed out. What has not been recognized is his reliance on a familiar formula of frontier humor, that of the shrewd bargainer out-tricked by those he has set out to cheat.

The hoax is of course not an invention of the American backwoods, but the hoax with a hyperbolic quality is characteristically American: Mark Twain's jumping frog story is a good example of the inflated practical joke told with a dead-pan exaggeration. Similarly the suspense of the short stories "Centaur in Brass" and "Shingles for the Lord" depends on the tricking of the trickster. In *The Hamlet* this is carried out to an extreme length. Jody Varner learns about Ab Snopes' part in the burning of the Harris barn after he has promised to rent his land to Ab. At first Jody plans to take advantage of this information to force Ab to leave the farm once the corn has been raised. When he learns from Ratliff that Ab has been involved in a second barn burning, he is so terror-stricken that he readily agrees to Flem's proposition. He rationalizes Flem's salary by considering it fire insurance. Through this initial toehold, as we have noted before, Flem gains control of the village and most of the Varner interests. Ratliff, perceiving the irony of this, imagines Jody saying to Flem when Snopeses start popping up all over the place:

"I want to make one pure and simple demand of you and I want a pure and simple Yes and No for a answer: How many more is there? How much longer is this going on? Just what is it going to cost me to protect one goddam barn full of hay?" (p. 76)

Angered and sickened by the discovery of Flem's exploitation of the idiot, Ratliff sends a cryptic message to Will Varner: "It ain't been proved yet" (p. 101). He is referring, of course, to Ab's barn burnings. One phase of the hoax is resolved with Flem's superseding Jody. A

<sup>9</sup> Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism*, p. 93.

second phase begins when Ratliff outwits Flem in the goat deal in Book I though his victory turns out to be Pyrrhic. The final turnabout is Flem's triumph over Ratliff by tricking him into buying the worthless Frenchman's property with his half-interest in a Jefferson restaurant. Though the "joke" is on Jody and Ratliff, the entire hamlet suffers from its repercussions.

According to Constance Rourke, backwoods humor was broad, grotesque or macabre while the humor of the Yankee was in a lower key, ironic and pervasive rather than exaggerated and explicit. Parts of the "Eula" book belong to the broadly comic tradition. The inflated quality of the prose style is the expression of an extravagantly humorous attitude rather than, as it has been interpreted, simply another example of the "fulness" of Faulkner's style.<sup>10</sup> The picture of Eula so lazy that "she grew from infancy to the age of eight in chairs, moving from one to another about the house as the exigencies of sweeping and cleaning house and eating meals forced her to break cover" (p. 108) is a comic improvisation verging on the frontier "boast" or lie. Since Eula declined to walk to school, Jody had to carry her there and back on his horse. Jody's vision of himself transporting "not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses" (p. 113) is another hyperbole in this vein. Faulkner's transmutation of the common country barnyard joke to Ike's almost mystical passion for the cow is equally fantastic. Similarly, the Snopeses are individually wildly comic, and there is something both terrifying and ridiculous in their ubiquity. The "Spotted Horses" scene with its disastrous consequences and the Pat Stamper episode with its comic-painful note fall in that area of the grotesque, being both terrible and laughable.

Hyperbole, grotesque even monstrous jokes, and tall tales are all characteristics of frontier humor which Faulkner has adapted, whether consciously or not does not matter, for his own purposes. The "gamecock of the wilderness" boast has been translated into a generalized humorous extravagance. The identification of men with animals ("I am half-horse, half-alligator") used as it was on the frontier as a boast of prowess becomes in Faulkner a means of suggesting the omnivor-

<sup>10</sup> This supports Warren Beck's assertion that Faulkner's style is remarkably flexible and experimental and that there are various Faulkner "styles," not just one notoriously obvious one. See Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism*, pp. 147-164.

ousness of his sub-human creations, the Snopeses.

In his role as the ethical, rational commentator, the Yankee-like Ratliff provides the quiet, ironical humor which counterpoints the extravagance of the tall tales and the realism of the Mink Snopes section. He is a genial story teller and eye witness who makes it possible for the reader to accept the plausibility of the story and still enjoy its essential absurdity. The extravagant situations and exuberant tone of much of the novel are tempered by Ratliff's habitual understatement and deceptively mild irony.

The concrete, inventive, humorous language in parts of *The Hamlet* can be related to the tradition of racy folk speech on the frontier. In the Pat Stamper story, told in the first person by Ratliff, Faulkner captures the vivid, concrete quality of his talk. The wagon drawn by the unmated mules went "swurging up that hill and into the Square like a roach up a drainpipe" (p. 44). To borrow a span of mules from Old Man Ans was like "going up to a rattlesnake and borrowing a rattle" (p. 51). In his trade, Ab had "walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found out it was quicksand" (p. 42).

The "Spotted Horses" episode, as was noted before, is told from an omniscient author's point of view which allows Faulkner greater flexibility in projecting the significance of the episode in thematic and narrative terms. But he has not lost the quality of folk speech. For example, Ratliff's speech is intellectualized, especially when it is compared with his narration of the Stamper episode. "'What a opportunity for that Snopes family lawyer this would a been, [he remarks about I.O.] What's his name? that quick-fatherer, the Moses with his mouth full of mottoes and his coat-tail full of already halfgrown retroactive sons?'" (p. 368). This is in Ratliff's own idiom, but the language has been modified to meet the exigencies of the point of view and over-all tone of the section. By which no more is indicated than what one would expect: Faulkner exploits the raw materials of language, in this case in a folk tradition, for the artistic effect he wishes to achieve.

Similarly, Faulkner has converted the raw materials of theme, plot, character and humor into a "made" work of art. To be sure, the form does not satisfy the requirements of the Jamesian ideal and tradition. But to seek a perfectly symmetrical unity in *The Hamlet*, as I have tried to suggest in this study, is to embark on a futile quest, one on which, worst of all, the seeker is made impervious to the depths and intricacies of the Faulknerian pattern.



## WALLACE FOWLIE:

### Pétras Borel

ENID STARKIE: *Pétras Borel, the Lycanthrope: His Life and Times*. New Directions.

Pétras Borel is known to students of French literature largely through Baudelaire's short article on him, printed in the collection of prose pieces, *L'Art Romantique*. When Baudelaire wrote this article, in 1859, Borel's name was used by journalists to express their scorn and distaste for the macabre type of Romantic poetry and for the type of flamboyant genius characterized by excesses of bohemianism and excessive affectation. Baudelaire, who revered Borel and felt strong sympathy for him, explained the aptness of the name "Lycanthrope," associated with Borel. This "wolf-man" or "werewolf" behaved as a man demonized and living in the dark forests of melancholy. He exemplified a favorite word of Baudelaire, *le guignon*, which signifies that kind of evil fate which pursues a man and from which he is unable to recover. *Le Guignon* is a goddess possessing, more than any pope or lama, the privilege of infallibility. Baudelaire explains by *le guignon* the irreconcilables in the life of Borel, the genius of the poet in the preface poem of *Madame Putiphar*, and the epic skill of the writer in several scenes of this novel, and the endless difficulties and hardships he encountered throughout his life.

No theory is proposed by Baudelaire to explain the number of *guignons* in the career of Pétras Borel. He merely hints at the symptoms of morbidity in the man's nature which maintained and even nurtured flagrant contradictions. Signs of psychic disturbance were evident even in Borel's handwriting, in his spelling, in the agony which the writing of the simplest letter caused him. The Romantic movement in France would not have been complete without the "Lycanthropy" of Pétras Borel. Baudelaire distinguishes between the early phase of Romanticism when the imagination of the poets was concerned with the past, with nostalgia and regret, and the second phase, more active and violent and earthy. Borel was one of the most picturesque and vehement characters of this second phase. He incarnated the spirit of the *Bousingos* in his attire and in his hate for the king and the bourgeoisie. During the years 1830-1835, when he was most famous and influential, he expressed his approval of the emphasis on excessive color and form in literature and art, and he sympathized with the dandy's creed, with the Byronic pessimism and dilettantism of an entire generation which, paradoxically, was both turbulent and bored.

Dr. Enid Starkie's study of Borel is a companion volume to her important studies of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. It is an illuminating, carefully documented biography of Borel and a history of his times. She expresses throughout her book a sympathy for Borel which is quite reminiscent of Baudelaire's. She explains, in far greater detail than Baudelaire, the failures of the man, his ambitions, his awkwardness in human relationships, his *génie manqué*, his love

for literature, his belief in himself as a writer and in the writer's vocation. Miss Starkie does not fail to describe the dignity and nobility of Borel, traits which were often overshadowed by eccentricities, mannerisms, fits of depression and violence. The criticism and evaluation she makes of Borel's writings are the most extensive yet to appear in English.

Miss Starkie discusses in some detail especially two works of Borel. *Champavert*, published in 1833, she considers his most important work and his most original. The book is made up of five tales and two autobiographical sketches, the second of which is "Champavert le Lycanthrope," the writer's own account of his life. The tales are not immoral, as was alleged at the time, but they are tales of horror, with elements of sadism, that would illustrate André Breton's famous category of *l'humour noire*. *Madame Putiphar* was written in Le Baizil, a small village in Champagne, where Borel lived in a wooden shack, in extreme poverty and solitude. The book describes almost every kind of horror and cruelty. When it appeared, in 1839, it passed almost unnoticed. One critic, Janin, compared Borel to the Marquis de Sade, which was an unjustified comparison but which pleased Borel. The verse prologue to the novel was greatly admired by Baudelaire and influenced him.

Fully half of Miss Starkie's book on Borel is devoted to the writer's background, to a history of the times and especially to the literary and artistic movements between 1827 and 1835. *Le Petit Cénacle* emerged in 1827: a group of ten or twelve poets and artists, headed by Pétrus Borel, who undertook a fight against classicism in French art and letters. Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval are today the best known figures of *Le Petit Cénacle*, but at the time, Borel himself best represented the new spirit of poetry. He amazed and amused the group with his stories and his paradoxes, in much the same way that Baudelaire was to shock his contemporaries a bit later. Victor Hugo turned to Borel to help him form a *claque* for the première of *Hernani* in 1830. For this momentous occasion, which is admirably described by Enid Starkie, Borel organized a group of one hundred students from the Latin Quarter and taught them the passages of the text where they should express themselves vocally.

The story of Borel's rise to fame and the decline of his reputation transpires within just a few years, but they were colorful and violent years in French history. The July Revolution of 1830, the cholera of 1832 which exterminated 20,000 Parisians, the carnival of 1832 when all of Paris was turned into a bacchanalia, are evoked by Miss Starkie. She describes Philippe Musard, the celebrated conductor of the dance orchestra at the *Variétés*, a grotesque little man, believed to be possessed by the Devil. Borel was also an important leader of *Les Jeunes-France*, made up of members of *Le Petit Cénacle*, who used this new name to indicate that they were the youngest and most adventurous opponents of Louis-Philippe. They finally adopted the name of *Bousingos* (from *bousin*, meaning a noise). But Borel's supremacy was being questioned by 1835. At that time, Gautier broke away from the *Bousingos* and founded his own circle in the Impasse du Doyenné, near the Palais Royal. The new group, referred to as *La Bohème du Doyenné*, included Delacroix, Corot, Chasseriau. A house-warming party at Gautier's, in November, 1835, marked the end of Borel's influence, and the end, according to Miss Starkie, "of the charnel-house phase in French literature."

SHERMAN PAUL:

## "Man's Perennial Depth Interests"

PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT: *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism*. Indiana University Press.

"A universe of infinite semantic possibility," of "semantic plenitude"—this is what Mr. Wheelwright, philosopher and literary critic, wants to reclaim for our time. He is not arguing merely for metaphoric, symbolic and mythic expression, as some new critics pleased with verbal puzzles do; he is trying to relate these kinds of expression, that is, poetry, to the religious experience that underlies the mythopoeic imagination. His interest in studying the language of symbolism is in the kind of expression that "pierces into the depths of the heart, and mounts upwards to the dwellings of the gods." It is for this reason, I think, that he is fascinated by the symbols of the *trinacria* and the cosmic fire, and that he has chosen *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Oresteia* and Eliot's *Four Quartets* ("the most fully pertinent single poem in our moment in history") for his most thorough explication. These symbols show the mythopoeic imagination at work, and these essentially religious works of art represent for him the full expression of man—the possibilities of *expressive* or *depth* language as contrasted with the *steno*-language, the literal language of science.

Everyone interested in poetry—indeed, everyone interested in experience—should welcome Mr. Wheelwright's quietly impassioned defense of an open universe of meaning, and his tolerant demand that the language of science and the language of poetry live and let live. The central intent of his book is not this, however, but to establish a level of meaning (a kind of seeing and a kind of experience) higher than that of logical discourse. Although he chooses to analyze only the language of science, science itself hovers in the background; and the victory he prepares for the language of poetry is a victory for that kind of apprehension of the universe that can only be called religious. When he says that expressive language is *fuller* or has *depth* this is what he means. If the language of science is utilitarian, a language of phenomena, the language of poetry is human, a language of phenomena *and* noumena. This transcendental level of language is, of course, most important to Mr. Wheelwright because it widens and deepens our universe, and because it represents man's reaching beyond to a reality without credentials in our time.

Reading this long, finely organized and logically acute study, however, forces one to give the enemy his due. How difficult it is in our time to talk about, much less affirm, a "spiritual" level. How sad it is that we no longer have the sensibility of the seventeenth century and have to use (and be taught to use) the perspectives of poetry to see our universe. Not that any amount of exegesis of archetypal symbols will ever accustom us to see mythopoeically. And to relearn that way of seeing is fraught with difficulties and followed by excruciating methodological problems and doubts, as the writers of our own Transcendental period discovered. For it is not enough to affirm a spiritual level, as Mr. Wheelwright knows; one has the heavy burden of proving it

meaningful, of showing that man's spiritual (poetic) expression intends a reality, and is not, as the logical positivists once too glibly assumed, an emotion without an object. This is Mr. Wheelwright's major objective; and his work is defined almost entirely by the terms in which the early I. A. Richards set forth the canon of semantic positivism. Now, if Mr. Wheelwright cannot give us the reality that poetry intends with any more certainty (positivistic certainty) than others who have tried to maintain the cognitive function of poetry, he can, with considerable dialectical skill, establish a pluralism of truths—he can topple semantic positivism from its pedestal by showing that, like all conceptions of truth, it merely states a set of conditions in terms of which we are willing to assent. And however serviceable semantic positivism may be, if "truth" is only that which is empirically, publicly verifiable, the domain of truth to which we are willing to assent is appreciably narrowed. It seems to me that Mr. Wheelwright has done a genuine service in showing the reductiveness of semantic positivism: no one has so nicely and sharply distinguished the assumptions of literal and expressive language. But he is not content to stop with the different functions of the languages of science and poetry (as Kenneth Burke did in "Semantic and Poetic Meaning"); he would say with Whitman: "Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration! / . . . facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, / I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling."

The semantics of the laboratory stands in relation to Mr. Wheelwright's defense of poetic truth as naturalism once did to the new humanists' defense of man's ethical nature. Both Mr. Wheelwright and the humanists find the science they confront naive, both attempt to be true to human experience, and both would like to find a place for literature somewhere between science and religion, certainly nearer religion than science. But Mr. Wheelwright is not a Babbitt or a More; having come this far by his study of the literary object and by his discipline in logic, philosophy and anthropology, he is a better, because more sophisticated, defender of the human function of literature. He is never shrill and argumentative; he understands his opponent, and it is apparent in his analysis of literature that he has had the kind of literary experience he defends. What he finds in literature is the complexity and ambiguity of knowing and being—man in his human dilemma, still standing before the universe, not in certainty, but in the awareness of legitimate mystery. This is as far as he takes us in identifying poetry and religion (unless one cares to read his chapter on Eliot's *Four Quartets* harder than I do). He defines only a common stance. Mr. Wheelwright would give us the world in its freshness and immediacy, but he would not separate man and nature as the new humanists did in their desire to save the human. For the heart of Mr. Wheelwright's view is man's continuity with nature, his ways into an intimacy with it—he calls it "confrontational mutuality," a sympathetic responsiveness for which Buber's "I-thou" relationship seems the best description. Indeed, to go beyond the language of science to mythopoeic language is to demand again a language of man's participation in nature. This is the stirring impulse of his criticism. His interest in linguistic devices and complexity inevitably becomes a concern for the kind of world they help us participate in.

If such poetry is ultimately religious, it is only because it has its origin in the mythopoeic modes of imaginative perception. It is "religious" in so broad

a sense, that it can be construed only as "serious visioning." There is no clamor for orthodoxy here. There is only an analysis of two ways of apprehending the universe. One recognizes, however, in the "assertorial weight" of this analysis the question that Mr. Wheelwright is asking: Isn't this the kind of truth we ought to assent to? But whether or not one answers this question (and I do not think an affirmative answer need involve one in identifying contemporary poetry and religion), the book has its value as a *Summa* of the critical enterprise of the last quarter century. Mr. Wheelwright reexamines, always lucidly and carefully, the language of critical discourse: metaphor, symbol, myth, ritual, imagination, tension, archetype, etc. And he reviews critically the work of Richards, Tate, Chase, Foss, Coleridge, Cassirer, Goethe, Kant, Freud, Frazer, Fromm, Jung, Buber, Fergusson, and others. As an introduction to the language of poetic vision his work will undoubtedly become indispensable. And as a reminder that our perception of reality is limited by the language we use—by our linguistic resources—it may widen the contemporary vision and revitalize the roots of perception.

## BABETTE DEUTSCH:

### Twentieth Century Sense and Sensibility

EDITH SITWELL: *Collected Poems*. Vanguard.

W. H. AUDEN: *The Shield of Achilles*. Random House.

In his vision of the range of human types, from the completely subjective to the completely objective, William Butler Yeats, as is well known, saw men belonging to one or another segment of a great circle. The three types that closed the circle were "Hunchback, Saint and Fool." The Hunchback he spoke of as one "jealous of those who can still feel." The Fool, on the contrary, is "jealous of all that can act with intelligence and effect." The Saint's joy is "to permit the total life, expressed in humanity, to flow in upon him and express itself through his acts and thoughts." Whether or not one accepts Yeats's rather rigid categories, there is something persuasive about the way he pictures these types. Certainly there are those who resemble his Hunchback in approximating pure Mind, scarcely concerned with the body yet longing for emotional life, and others, like his Fool, who are close to pure Being, enjoying an almost animal responsiveness, happy in natural activity, yet, being human, with a hunger for purposive living; while a few, like his Saint, are capable of an inclusive and humane self-surrender. Neither Dame Edith Sitwell nor W. H. Auden is a saint, though the work of both suggests that they may be envious of those who achieve sainthood. Who would ever think of either as a hunchback or a fool! The difference in their performance, nevertheless, summons up the difference between Yeats's archetypes. Dame Edith's *Collected Poems* radiate the glow of a lavish sensuousness. She courts ecstasy and anguish. The play of her imagination is magnificent. But it is crossed by allusions that

smell vexingly of the lamp. In contrast, Auden's poetry, and his latest volume is no exception, is the work of an acutely attentive intellect, which appears to regard feeling as the naughty or suspect intruder. Dame Edith, as her delighted audience knows, can be witty. Auden has written lyrics of exquisite tenderness. Both, of course, are eminently skilful in exploiting the various resources of the language. But where the baroque splendors of Dame Edith's poetry address our senses (to her, as to Blake, significant as "the chief inlets of the soul"), the learned stanzas that Auden composes make their original appeal to our good sense. Contrast, for example, the way in which Dame Edith, in one of her more recent poems, "Gardeners and Astronomers," speaks of the earth with a passage from Auden's "Ode to Gaea." Her poem opens:

Where the green airs seem fanning palms and the green psalms  
Of greater waters, where the orange hangs huge as Orion, and  
day-long great gauds and lauds of light

Pierce their gold through the seeds, behold their secrets,  
And the weight of the warm air  
Shapes the exquisite corolla to a world of gold rain  
Closed in thick gold armor like a King's,

Old men, dark-gold with earth and toil,  
Praise their green heavens . . .

It closes:

And happy as the Sun, the gardeners  
See all miasmas from the human filth but as the dung  
In which to sow great flowers,  
Tall moons and mornings, seeds, and sires, and suns.

Auden's Ode, however classical its title and relatively formal its pattern, takes off, appropriately for a twentieth century composition, from a plane, thus:

From this new culture of the air we finally see  
Far-shining in excellence, what our Mother, the  
Nicest daughter of Chaos, would  
Admire could she look in a glass,

And what, in her eyes, is natural: it is the old  
Grand style of gesture we watch as, heavy with cold,  
The top-waters of all her  
Northern seas take their vernal plunge,

And suddenly her desolations, salt as blood,  
Prolix yet terse, are glamorously carpeted  
With great swatches of plankton,  
Delicious spreads of nourishment,

While, in her realm of solids, lively dots expand,  
Companionship becomes an unstaid passion and  
Leaves by the mile hide tons of  
Pied pebbles that will soon be birds.

But if Auden soars into the heights for his view of the earth, it is with no such exaltation as Dame Edith's that he comes to a halt. On the contrary, his Ode ends with an acknowledgment of earth's stubborn indifference to human aspirations:

And Earth, till the end, will be herself; she has never been moved  
Except by Amphion, and orators have not improved  
Since misled Athens perished  
Upon Sicilian marble: what,

To her, the real one, can our good landscapes be but lies,  
Those woods where tigers chum with deer and no root dies,  
That tideless bay where children  
Play bishop on a golden shore.

A more striking illustration of the gulf between the two poets is to be enjoyed by examining one of Edith Sitwell's poems on love, human or divine, after reading the couplets Auden builds upon Touchstone's remark that "The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning." His lines begin: "By all means sing of love, but, if you do,/Please make a rare old proper hullabaloo." After a number of observations "*Spass gesagt und ernst gemeint*," the piece concludes:

What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,  
Can trick [Man's] lying nature into saying  
That love, or truth in any serious sense,  
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence.

Both Auden and Dame Edith, being poets, delight in verbal play, but his fondness for it is far less apt than hers to loosen reticence.

The handsome volume which she calls *Collected Poems*, for all its amplitude, is incomplete. It does, however, present the major part of her work, including the most recent, a few early pieces not reprinted in previous collections, and two versions of "Metamorphosis." Indeed, the title of that poem might well be the title of the book. Poems previously placed in one group have been transferred to another. Thus, the lyric, "A Sylph's Song," placed here among the "Later Poems: 1940-1945," is to be found in her *Rustic Elegies*, published as early as 1927, where it was part of "Prelude to a Fairytale." The prefatory essay, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry," is likewise familiar as an exposition of the poet's experiments with abstract sounds, an appraisal of her own performance, and a statement of what she is endeavoring to do. The text has been slightly rearranged and augmented. But what chiefly gives one the impression of metamorphosis is the way in which certain phrases and images recur in poems of widely different significance, and the fact that occasionally a passage from an old poem will find itself happily at home in a new one. If this is somewhat distracting, it also gives a sense of continuity. What some readers might feel to be a limitation, others will rest in, as offering the pleasures of recognition. Alone those weary of pomp and sumptuousness will fail to respond to the grandeur of Dame Edith's references and the richness of her imagery. She plunders heavens and earth, history and mythology, poetry and

prose, as a child with a love for fantasy might ransack its mother's wardrobe, to apparel her verse in strange and gorgeous metaphors. There is wild extravagance here, but there is immense vitality, too. A few abstractions and some scraps of learning obtrude awkwardly, only to recede before an instance of pure lyricism, of rollicking fun, or of exultant vision. And the volume shows, more clearly than any previous collection of Edith Sitwell's work, her capacity for dealing with two pressing and difficult themes: the amoral exhaustion of our times and the acknowledgment of old age.

What Auden acknowledges in his ambitiously named book is middle age. There is a poem by Po Chü-I which declares:

Between thirty and forty, one is distracted by the Five Lusts;  
Between seventy and eighty, one is a prey to a hundred diseases.  
But from fifty to sixty one is free from all ills;

Calm and still—the heart enjoys rest.

What happens between forty and fifty he does not tell us, but Auden, not far from the state where "one is free from all ills," surveys the landscape, tells the canonical hours, and reflects, often tongue-in-cheek, on very disparate matters, such as railway travel, the fleet, politics, and art. His observations respecting Winds, Woods, Mountains, Lakes, Islands, Plains, and Streams are entertaining, knowledgeable and provocative, like good talk. They mix the language of common speech ("I know a retired dentist who only paints mountains") with the usual language of poetry ("Tall pomp of stone where goddesses lay sleeping"). They are as various in form as the subjects they present. But the reader is far more conscious of the activity of the poet's mind than of the aspects of land and water over which it plays like a rapid searchlight. Similarly, the "*Horae Canonicae*" refer to the personae of fairytales, the machinery of the modern State, the physical and psychological commonplaces of urban life today, rather in the voice of a brilliant dinner partner than in that of a religionist who happens to be a poet. They, too, show formal variety and the technical cleverness that one expects of their author. Possibly one holding to the poet's credo might have another view of them, but the reader who does not is apt to enjoy them without being reminded of the nature of religious experience. The title poem, which is placed with the miscellaneous pieces in Section II, is not the least memorable in this slender book. It contrasts the homely, happy, strenuous scenes of an ordered life that Thetis expects to see Hephaestus hammer out on her son's shield with the "artificial wilderness" under "a sky of lead" that we have learned to accept in the shape of the military camp, the concentration camp, and the ugly, loveless city. The contrast is emphasized by the shift from the lilting, lyrical stanzas about Thetis' anticipations to the dry iambs which tell what she saw forming under the lame forger's hands. It is not one of the most brilliant pieces in the collection, but it is one of those that engage the emotions as well as the mind.

To read Auden and Dame Edith at about the same time is to realize afresh that each is uniquely and greatly gifted, that they are as unlike in performance as any two living poets, and that, unhappily, they are not likely to learn from one another.



## HERBERT GOLDSTONE:

### Of Comedy and Tragedy

ELIZABETH HARDWICK: *The Simple Truth*. Harcourt, Brace.

OAKLEY HALL: *Mardios Beach*. Viking.

HARVEY SWADOS: *Out Went the Candle*. Viking.

In *The Simple Truth* Elizabeth Hardwick seems to be fashioning an American Tragedy of the 1950's in describing the trial of an Iowa university student accused of strangling his fiancée. Like Clyde Griffiths, Rudy Peck is an earnest poor boy and Betty Jane Henderson, his girl, comes from a wealthy family. However, there the similarity ends, for Miss Hardwick pays much less attention to Rudy than to the reactions of three key spectators who comment on the trial and over-interpret with a vengeance. Joe Parks is a would-be writer who believes he has tremendous powers of empathy and a capacity for fine, interesting reactions. He considers Rudy a victim of the unfair social system and therefore not really guilty. Doris, his wife, broods over abstract principles and tries to relate them to petty details of household management. If she can't, she simply ignores her domestic chores and concentrates on asking herself if she is living seriously all the time. Anita Mitchell is a faculty wife who is fascinated by "interesting" people and applies amateur psychoanalysis to their every motive. In so fastidiously expressing their ideas about the trial, these three seem like shepherds in pastoral comedy and the university an Arcadia. However, in the end the characters find themselves in the wood of error, since they become so lost in their complex analyses of the trial they cannot understand how the jury *simply acquits* Rudy.

What interests Miss Hardwick about her central characters and drives her to expose them and their ideas is that they are all intellectual snobs swollen with pride. Lost in speculation and absorbed in their own impressions, they cannot understand the trial as a human situation. When Joe explains Rudy's behavior to an unknown bar companion, the latter (who is Rudy's best friend) is so bewildered he rushes away. Blinded as they are, the three main characters lead empty lives without much feeling. Joe and Doris verbalize away their emotions, while Anita and her husband regard their home as a "special place, clean, silent, arousing condolence like a hospital."

In presenting her characters and their ideas, Miss Hardwick brilliantly utilizes her talent for crisp and controlled irony. She skillfully portrays Anita's highly romantic imagination at work on Rudy:

Immediately, without waiting for the story's peculiar circumstances, those unsettling second thoughts, she saw him as a sacrificial animal, the fresh young lamb to be offered up for society's well-being. She could hardly think, without an ache of despair for mankind, of his abasement, his dangerous situation, which was that of a mythical youth who could turn neither to left nor right.

Despite such fine writing, the book is too thin. The preoccupation with comment becomes almost self-defeating, for nothing really happens, and, like Miss Hardwick's first novel, *The Ghostly Lover*, there is no narrative structure to speak of. Nor are the ideas themselves—the varieties of snobbish experience—given any bold interplay or development, so that once a character states his ideas and amplifies them, they become patently familiar and too easily ridiculed. In the end, Miss Hardwick's marvellous irony plays her false. Her characters' ideas are so exposed that the characters themselves stand out as lonely, pathetic human beings deserving of more understanding and warmth than the author can apparently give them. Here, as in *The Ghostly Lover*, characters remain static, and somehow the novel is over before it truly begins.

Oakley Hall's San Diego suburb, Mardios Beach, would seem poles apart from the academic groves of Iowa, yet it too has a pastoral flavor. On the surface Mardios Beach is a materialistic Arden filled with TV sets, ranch style houses, and flashy Buicks and Cads. But the glossy surface is just an illusion; underneath it is a seething jungle. Here the central characters are Bill Gregory, an aggressively successful used car dealer for whom sex and money are the end-all, and Keith Rankin, a clean-cut fraternity boy type, who has never questioned his or any one else's motives. When Keith discovers that his widowed mother, Hattie, has been Bill's mistress, and Bill realizes neither Keith's mother nor his wife cares for him, a chain reaction takes place in which Keith elopes and his mother has to give up her business, and Bill loses his wife to another man, and causes his son's death.

From this description, *Mardios Beach* may seem to be just a *tour de force* of sensationalistic incidents, but actually it is a grim, Hardy-esque tragedy offering only a slight hope for amelioration. Sex and materialism are such dominant human drives that even those who see their limitations cannot escape them. In Hall's tragic world, choice seems to be an illusion, as Keith so profoundly discovers. In trying to overcome his disillusionment with his mother, Keith elopes with Mary Lynn Seibert, a very pretty and apparently sympathetic girl. However, she is as flagrantly materialistic as Bill and wants Keith only because she believes his mother is rich. With such limited choice, self-understanding, if it can come at all, brings little relief. Keith is appalled to recognize his own strong materialistic drive when he finds himself unable to give up his car after discovering that Bill had presented it to his mother. In attaching so much importance to his car, Keith sees he is not so much different from Bill, so that accepting himself also means symbolically accepting Bill as his father. Bill, on the other hand, cannot really understand what he has done and therefore accept his responsibility. He only learns he must, as Hattie points out, settle for his mistress with whom he can live on a strictly business basis. To mention Hattie is to realize, finally, the pervasive force of Hall's determinism, for, as strongly as Hattie comes to oppose Bill and his values, she cannot escape him. She gives him up because she sees how her relationship with him has spoiled her as a mother and a decent human being. But in renouncing Bill, she has to prepare to sell out her business to pay back money she owes him. Moreover, with Keith married to a girl like Mary Lynn, she has to work to

help him through school. At the end of the book Hattie stoically accepts her situation and genuinely can feel for others, but she does not seem too happy. The other strong opponent of Bill's materialism, Dick Bannerman, a moderately idealistic young builder, cannot escape Bill either, though he seems happier than Hattie. It is to Bannerman that Bill's wife, broken in spirit by her child's death, turns, and he willingly accepts her. Previously he could merely abstractly identify himself with suffering; now he has "one concrete tragedy to give himself to."

Hall's determinism in *Mardios Beach* is qualified by Hattie's vague stoicism and Bannerman's martyr-like compassion, both of which attitudes are not stated positively, but negatively in opposition to Bill. Limited as these alternatives are, they still represent a more mature vision of determinism than that in Hall's earlier novel, *Corpus of Joe Bailey*, where characters could see their lives only in terms of material and sexual success and failure. But there is a heavy price for such wisdom. All the characters, except Bill, who remembers some good times, seem to be gray and bleak and blatantly unromantic. Joe Bailey, for all his confused struggling to find his identity and all his defeats, has a zest for living, and even his blind and fruitless devotion to his adolescent love, Con Robertson, has some of the romantic wonder of Gatsby's love for Daisy. For these reasons, *Joe Bailey*, though cruder and conceptually simpler, is probably a better book, since it is livelier.

In technique, Hall uses his variant of the shifting point of view. He blocks out his action in sequences, in each of which one character has the central role; and it is through him that we see the scene and sense reactions. Our image of characters is a composite of them as they reveal themselves when they have the key role in a scene and when in other scenes they are subordinate figures. In each scene, the language and detail are designed to individualize the central character. Within each central character, Hall carefully restricts himself to only the most apparent mental processes, those immediately leading to action or speech. Consequently his characters live in a tangible, narrow world, and, like actors in a play, they move, think, and speak in a very definite space they block out for themselves.

Such a method heightens the drama, for each sequence directly involves action and conflict, and the sequences, without our realizing it, lead to the climactic moments. In addition, Hall can create vivid contrasts between characters or between the character as he seems to himself and to some one else. And within this naturalistic frame of reference, Hall makes the very things a character consistently does, or associates himself with, strong symbols of his personality. Bill's powerful black Cadillac, for example, ironically contrasts to its toy replica which his son is too weak to pedal. With individual characters, this shifting technique works best for those who are vigorous or forthright, like Bill, Hattie, and Mary Lynn, or, like Bannerman, who are inclined to self-dramatization. Hattie's clipped, incisive speech, her briskly assertive movements, and her quick, sharp reactions to others' feelings come out very strongly. Most effective of all is Bill, who bursts with furious energy, and monolithic aggressiveness, and even his doubt and bewilderment are violently physical. On the other hand, confused and complicated characters, like Bill's wife, Bea, and Keith, do not come to life. Bea's revulsion from Bill, her despair, and yet

pity for him come out only when she *tells* Bannerman, she feels this way. Otherwise we would not know how she feels, or even if she feels at all. With Bea, the limitations of Hall's method are apparent, for very little of her character shows itself in such direct thought and action. Keith does not come into focus, because, for all his simplicity, he is deeply confused when he learns about his mother. Yet that confusion is never expressed, so that at the end his self-acceptance seems mechanical.

The failure of Bea and Keith to be sufficiently realized noticeably lessens the book's impact and blurs its vision. Were Bea able to evoke her past as a member of a distinguished society family, her present plight would, by contrast, be much more meaningful. With Keith, the failure is more important, for, placed strategically as he is, between Bill and Bannerman, and Hattie and Mary Lynn, he embodies in his own person the conflicting forces for good and evil on which the book turns. Were he more fully realized, the book would be more richly concrete in its vision. Yet, granting this limitation, *Mardios Beach* is a stark and austere impressive novel.

For Harvey Swados, in his first novel, materialism also involves tragedy, as he chronicles the rise and fall of Herman Felton, a fascinatingly shrewd Jewish businessman, whom the war makes and crushes. In *Out Went the Candle*, however, Herman's grandiose, though destructive, efforts to assert himself and aid his family symbolize his materialism and are part of a larger theme, the gap between the generations which the war accentuates. Swados works out his theme by concentrating on Herman; his son, Morrow, in full revolt against him; his beautiful and brilliant daughter, Betsy, who is torn apart by the war and her reaction against her father; Bunty Traynor, a devilishly decadent proper Bostonian, who tries to seduce and blackmail Betsy; and Joe Burley, a young journalist whom Betsy meets in summer school. Except in the first part when Joe, Bunty, and Betsy are together in summer school, the book has no central dramatic focus and the characters go their separate ways. It is held together tenuously only by Joe himself, who becomes chorus and *deus ex machina* as he keeps meeting Herman and Morrow.

Unquestionably, the most interesting and powerful character is Herman. Before the war he was a moderately successful garment district manufacturer with dreams of grandeur out of proportion to his talents, and with a corny business philosophy cribbed from Arthur Brisbane and Roger Babson. But the war, with its opportunities for contract negotiation and finagling, converts his liabilities into major assets—at least for a while. What gives him tragic stature is the force of his ambivalent drives to assert himself and to help his family, whom he feels he must fiercely protect and constantly guide. Like Bill Gregory, he is driven to get back at the world and to prove himself, and his fantastic ambition and family devotion embody that need. He has no idea how little of the world he understands nor what awful damage he can do his children by the force of his example. Morrow rebels against his father's business methods and his power and consequently carries on this battle against army authority. Betsy, on the other hand, idolizes her father and completely accepts his view of the world. Finding it so blatantly false, she seems compelled to mortally wound her father.

Herman differs from Bill in that he genuinely loves his family and has much more self-insight, though it remains limited. He shows his love most strongly when he abandons his business empire at the precise moment he should be defending it to rush to London to save Morrow from court martial. During the voyage, he poignantly senses his failure as a father, and in a London air-raid shelter, huddled together with refugees, recognizes how he has been exploiting their misery for his war profits. Yet he can still envision himself as the great crusader daringly opposing a hostile world. To the end, the most impressive thing about Herman is the force of his ambivalent drives.

Of the others, Bunty stands out most vividly for his brazenly amoral cunning that far transcends Herman's. He seems as completely unaffected by any humane considerations as Machiavelli's princes, and he has a childish zest for enjoying his scheming. In her intrigues with Bunty and Joe, Betsy can be both incredibly naive about her father and Bunty, and yet unassumingly idealistic in her desire to *be* somebody. However, in the second half of the book she disintegrates too easily. Morrow seems too much to embody a type, the passionate idealist driven by hatred of his father. Joe at first is an ordinary, not too intelligent, opportunistic guy of decent instincts, who fascinates us because he can almost become a heel. Yet during the war he ripens into a mature, quietly perceptive, and responsible man. The change however does not occur before our eyes; he merely affirms it later, as he becomes a vehicle for the author's ideas.

The most basic of these ideas is that the war can brutally destroy and yet hopelessly renew. It unleashes man's deepest and fiercest hatreds, and yet opens his heart to love and elemental human understanding. Stated so abstractly, these ideas seem platitudinous, and occasionally they become so when Joe overstates them out of character, but they take on the rich complexity of tragic insight as they are concretely embodied in Herman. In his own person, he hates so blindly and loves so passionately as to shatter his family and ruin himself, and yet out of the wreckage he may, through reconciliation with his family, redeem his humanity. And as an American Jew, exposed perhaps most openly to the conflicting drives of our materialist society, he symbolizes its terrible destructiveness and yet its misguided idealism.

As a whole, *Out Went the Candle* is terribly uneven in writing and disbalanced in structure. The language at times borders on passionate rant, the first part of the book is top-heavy in relation to the others, Joe and Betsy diminish into intellectual constructs, and the frame of the book, as Irving Howe points out, is not large enough to support Herman. All these are very real defects. But Swados has a genuine wit, a real talent for evoking places and events, an instinctive ability to breathe life into his characters, and an unabashed warmth of feeling for them. *Out Went the Candle* is not as finished or as powerful as *Mardios Beach*, but its world is bigger and its characters' potentialities greater. And, for a first novel, it certainly augurs well.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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A NOTICE TO OUR READERS: It is well known that Dylan Thomas left behind him many non-commercial or "home" recordings, on wire, tape or disc; now his recording publishers are trying to get hold of such unpublished recordings in order that they may be made available to the general public. This seems, in terms of the future, an important project. If you have unpublished recordings by Dylan Thomas, or know of anybody who has, please write Carl Hartman, English Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.

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# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume XV, Number 3

Summer, 1955

## DANIEL MARDER:

### The Szechwan Variation

At the age of twenty-two, Dmitri Simpkoﬀ had become such a master of languages that the Far Eastern University of Vladivostok appointed him to their Oriental faculty. The appointment was timely. If it had not come through, Simpkoﬀ would have been forced into the Czar's Army. Instead, he spent the next three years of his life at the University, vigorously investigating a dialect variation spoken only in the South of Szechwan Province. He read all the available histories, unearthed a great volume of little known folklore and compiled maps and charts and figures. At the end of this period, however, he had to stop though his study was not completed and nothing had been conclusively proven. He had to stop because he could go no further. Not a library in Vladivostok would yield him anything more. "To complete my study," Simpkoﬀ clearly saw, "I must necessarily enter the field itself." No alternatives were weighed nor any decision rendered; he was impelled. In February, 1917, the University extended a grant and he chose the city of Luchow on the Yangtze as headquarters for his field work.

He was eager to leave as soon as possible, but he had to face the fact of winter, that in winter ice blocks the Vladivostok port. This meant waiting and never before had time been empty for him. Automatically, he returned to his work. Under pressure it would assume various shapes and forms but yielded no addition. He went,

finally, to the cafes and cabarets of the frozen city where he listened to gossip about Bolsheviks and the possible American entry into the European War. This gossip passed through him, untouched and untouching. Combat bored Simploff. But when the talk turned to the War Lords still fighting in some provinces of China, his curiosity was fired. His ear became especially sensitive to any mention of Szechwan.

And when the ice finally broke into floes, Szechwan had changed for him. It was not only where a dialect played peculiar variations. It was a province depopulated by a revolution five years back, an actual space of earth, houses and trees in which fifteen million souls had been destroyed, many of them, he had to reflect, perhaps all, crying out in the language he was going to define.

Soon steamers began to appear in the port. They came and departed, but they were Japanese. On the tenth of April a Russian ship sailed.

According to the shipping catalogues, the sea was calm at that time of year, but it bucked and bolted nevertheless. Simploff wondered about his own, the Black Sea; not the sea itself, but his notion of it which had also been calm until then. And he considered his fears. Fears came naturally to everyone the first time at sea, Simploff thought, so he made up a variety of them and conjugated them like classic verbs. At Nagasaki he began a little notebook, in Japanese. He did not write of the ice floes about Vladivostok nor of the wet air at Nagasaki. For the present, he decided to mark down only the names of all the new places he was encountering.

On the second morning out of Nagasaki, the steamer, *Lastashka*, infiltrated a forest of masts and sails, of destroyers and merchant ships and junks sitting a knot up the river from Shanghai. Simploff was puzzling at the skyline. He wondered whether its great domes, its Greek columns and its gables fitted best an overall pattern of Byzantine, Roman, Renaissance or Neo-Classic, when the word, "Shanghai!" burst in his ear. It was Madame Grovenka. Simploff had kicked her their first night out while seeking his cabin door in the dark. She apparently had the technique of sudden appearance and perhaps considered this explosion in his ear a mere whisper.

"Shanghai so soon," she said with less power. "I think I'm afraid. You needn't pity."

She was not the first of her kind to him but the first Simploff had been willing to endure since leaving his home on the Black Sea,



perhaps because the rings on her fingers (he had counted eight huge radiating stones, one a ruby atop a plain gold wedding band) mystified him. Still he thought her a box of old-style Russian curiosity filled with surface observations, petty interests and profane questions. He endured her with a benign smile.

The rings, she explained, were all that remained of a fortune which had been forfeited to the Czar's government because of her husband's revolutionary activity. Her present "flight from the Motherland" was still another forfeit. As Simploff listened, lines of sincerity grew into his smile, but then, slowly, as her questioning fell upon him—"Are you Siberian? You are not in uniform? Are you one of those crazy revolutionaries? Oh, my God!" (She crossed herself, her eyes above.) "Don't listen to me, it's my husband, killed stinking up a pot of revolt. The government has sent you perhaps? You are going to Shanghai?"—his smile cracked and broke altogether. He suffered a complete Russian moment in which he was with her, the same as she, and he was angry for it, calling himself "Atavistic," regardless of the Black Sea which the present waters had instantly become and of the fields he imagined (gold upright blades blown as in the paintings) where Madame Grovenka flushed a vague dancing heart, so light, so vulgar.

"Yes," he lied, "the government sent me," not stating which government.

The next morning, with his smile reformed and with apparent disgust for his pointless lie, he evaded further inquiry. "My mission cannot be divulged," he told her childishly.

"How cruel you are. A revolutionary, that's what I believe. You will come see me in Shanghai? I have no one."

Madame Grovenka was much too stout for Simploff, her dress and coat such ordinary, dull garments, worn too well and fitting ill. Because of a mole starting out of a freckle over her lip, he guessed her age was ten years above his own. The flagrancy of her ringed fingers alone was enough to dismiss from Simploff's mind those gentlest ideas he might entertain for any civilized and orderly being. This morning it was she, rather than himself, who was disgusting.

All along deck, passengers began to bargain with the sampan men. Madame Grovenka demonstrated a vociferous tongue. When the bargaining was concluded, however, she hesitated and then refused to descend into the little wooden cylinder. "It will fall apart. I don't trust it." Finally she did consent, there being no other way to get

ashore; and then her objections to the odors, exclaimed between expressions of pity for the man pulling with a single oar at the stern, continued till they reached the wharf.

Late that afternoon Simploff boarded a Jardine side-wheeler for his trip up the Yangtze. He had written nothing in his Japanese notebook about Shanghai or about Madame Grovenka. He had no time to inspect the city; that was reserved for the return trip. The mystery of Madame Grovenka's rings was still not solved to his satisfaction. He had asked about them again and received a more compatible lie. Though she was not in his notebook he did not forget her. And there was one other thing he carried away with him.

It was something he had seen rolling along the Bund and fidgeting and ferreting in the crowds on Nanking Road. It was a thing of stubs, no arms, no legs, and no speech except to plead "Cumshaw" from its blurred face while propelling itself like a drum with protruding corks. At first sight this was no more shocking than finding tramcars on the Bund. It was only a curiosity and rather a pleasure, fitting things known to one's experiencing of them, until he happened to listen, before sailing, to a group of coolies cajoling and nudging each other.

"Peesch, Peesch!" one was saying, "I would not give one copper for her."

"Lakuning Peesch!" said another, imitating the first. A ducklike noise interrupted.

Simploff looked downward to the source of the noise. He saw the beggar, who was uttering some garble of which Simploff could only catch, "Foreign garbage." Then, the others formed a laughing circle around the beggar and began kicking his groin. "Speak up, speak up." The beggar howled "Cumshaw, cumshaw, cumshaw," and laughed also, ducklike as before, his covered groin rocking the naked torso on the sidewalk.

As the side-wheeler climbed back out of the Whangpoo, Simploff noted the appearance of a mist, which persisted as they started up the Yangtze. "Always ahead, inland," he wrote in Japanese. "This is China's richest land, the Yangtze Valley. This afternoon an English-speaking man—we did not bother with names—had no idea of it. He seemed rather intelligent, but not to know where one is? He knew only that he came from Shanghai and was going to Hankow. I believe I startled him, speaking so well for my age. His eyes, while I spoke, seemed to be inspecting my capacities for understanding, but

then, nodding in appreciation, he suddenly excused himself and disappeared. Later when I approached him he acknowledged me and moved off. I wonder if I have frightened him. But he seemed so intelligent." Simploff wrote that the land was flat and irrigated wet. "The roads are too narrow for a bicycle." Later he began to count the canals which poured into the Yangtze, some larger ones offering up junks whose chanting oarsmen annoyed him. Having missed some, he decided to make his count more accurate upon his return trip.

On board he heard no one speak of the provincial wars, nor did he speak of them. In fact, since his encounter with the English-speaking man, Simploff was aloof to the other passengers, whom he dismissed as a pack of Grovenkas full of chatter and imposed friendship. Instead of them, he diverted himself with facts, remembering that this river, which he now called the "Yangtzekiang," and the Yellow River created this rich valley by their deposits of sediment stolen from the highlands of Tibet and carted three thousand miles through the mountains since long before the first of China's twenty fallen dynasties. He called to mind several of these dynasties, and then how they came so abruptly and bloodily to their end. Finally, the diversion itself rediverted him to the possibility of war in the land he was entering.

"I do not care for any sort of bravery," he wrote in his Japanese notebook the morning after a night wild with dreams and wakes. "What the world means by bravery is a Cossack or a pioneer. That is stupid. But I must say a man who follows his work into an uncertain country, though neither brave nor courageous, is at least up to these others and not nearly so stupid." This entry worked to settle him for the morning and to allow freedom for enjoyment of his intellect. He took pleasure in Wuhu, for instance, the city that rose out of the paddy fields. Workers, bending in the fields, appeared like statuettes against the slow-rising hills in the distance. There was pleasure in his knowledge that the land to the North would become brown while to the South only greener and that soon the hills would grow and become wooded and within twelve miles of present position he would experience the name, "Nine Lotus Flower Mountain," its rugged peaks and peeping temples, its burial mounds of great and imaginary Saints. The mist on the river, he ascertained, was just about twelve miles ahead, perhaps caught by the mountain.

The mist was not so far away and where the Nine Lotus Flower should have been were five peaks, equal to each other and to any

five peaks casually chosen in Russia or elsewhere. If there were any temples and mounds they were either hidden or jumbled in the rock. Still, one of them was the Nine Lotus Flower. Simploff felt it unjust, but not angrily, for this after all was a ludicrous feeling, as when he heard laughter from the dirty-cork-drummed beggar. If the beggar had only been what he was supposed to be, Simploff would not have to carry him along and would perhaps discover the mountain. To rid himself, Simploff went so far as to wonder if it were possible that the beggar had somewhere hidden those missing legs and arms. This had to be settled, some extant idea had to fit it and close it; he struggled. The idea he hit upon in the Yangtze that afternoon was an old one. Having gone through them all he returned to this: "One must learn to accept evil." On reflection he found this applied to Madame Grovenka as well. He pursued it no further.

The city of Ankiang was the next item on his journey. According to his information, the city was considered a boat, having two anchors actually fixed on its walls. Its Pagoda swung in the wind, tingling seven stories of bells, and was said to be the boat's mast. Ping and Chiang, which Simploff interpreted as "sail" and "oar" while he informed himself, were two names never appointed to official positions in the city because then it might float away down the river. Simploff anticipated a respectful humor to guide him through this primitiveness, but with all this story Ankiang was a place differing only slightly from the next, Kiukian, City of Nine Rivers, having no separate essence. Both were only as Shanghai had been, merely the knowledge he already had plus the tramcars.

Passing through the Lushan mountains he felt tired and dejected and unsatisfied. A flight of wild ducks in good formation were waving along with the air currents high above. These were not new to him and not Chinese. He had seen wild ducks before but had never really observed them as now, and now they recalled his town on the Black Sea where he could just as well have watched them. The town appeared cleaner than he could actually remember it, its streets the widest possible, and the buildings were straight and stood squarely, each apart from another. In the markets no smell could alloy that of the fresh-cut flowers, the shoppers had sun-shining faces wrapped in kerchiefs as magazines pictured them. His father was haggling with the grain merchants while his well-made fingers slipped through grain in the barrels. Simploff came to regret the ducks before they disappeared; their flight seemed to have taken his greater

part away. When they were gone he called what remained of him, "Unhappy." One of his thoughts was to have shot a bullet at them, to scatter them, destroy their inane mathematics. They left him feeling as nothing, without color, without motion, a sad thing that had only pity to turn upon itself. With this he landed at Hankow.

The Bund in Hankow was esplanaded and not cramped with Chinese. Simploff went immediately to the Chinese City. He wanted to know if it had been rebuilt since its destruction five years ago. He saw the Chinese living in the open, in straw huts, under sloping canopies hung from naked walls, and in sampans on the Han River. The jammed boats hid the water except for spots where empty buckets were dipped in and full ones splashed out and where occasional nude buttocks hung over. He returned to the Bund and arranged passage for Luchow. Then he went aboard to sleep but felt too sad for it.

His cabin was just a closet, a single wooden bunk and a sink. Having slept in his underwear since Shanghai, Simploff began to think he might smell. He read from an American novel and then from a linguistics book. He shaved, went back to bed and read over a hundred pages of his work on the Szechwan Variation, bothered all the while by his idea that this, his own body, his arms for instance, smelled independently. And then, still reading, he began to think of the Chinese, whether they were a happy people or not. Suddenly he discovered a certain basic difference which existed between himself and Grovenka and the beggar. They were not unhappy. She merely feigned unhappiness, while the beggar had no visions about either happiness or unhappiness. He, Simploff, was the only one unhappy. Without struggle he pushed out an answer. "A man," he wrote in his Japanese notebook, "is unhappy when his experiences do not fit his values." Entitled now to his unhappiness, he was still unable to sleep.

Gradually the concern for his own odor induced that of the sampans. He tried to separate it from the river's, an animal odor, one of buds blooming sour, of sweet decay, the wet off a coolie's back. The sampans' odor hinted of something concealed within the ice floes, of released wet air at Nagasaki, things not written in his notebook. He deciphered the odor's individual components as he thought the Frenchman would do with an accomplished sauce served him and as he himself intended to do with the language at Luchow. This final method was successful, he was able to sleep.

In the morning he marked the mist as they moved up the river

again. He made this note: "Imagine Grovenka with rosy cheeks and a narrow nose! I am beginning to have dreams. This is the second within a week."

The river was wan and the country was dull now for he knew little of it. Rafted logs drifted into the river from canals. The countryside was a patchwork of rice paddies, and here and there grown with tea. While setting the mist at various points in the distance, he imagined his future life at Luchow and then asked himself if it were possible he might want Madame Grovenka and how it was with other men who could just take a woman without a thought of themselves. He wondered about the beggar's life in this respect and was brought back to contemplating the possibilities of war and danger he now risked. The Jardine side-wheeler had carried him beyond the point where he had set the mist. He saw more paddy fields here and set the mist again. Lazily his eye caught an elusive object bobble up in the water. It was pale and arc-like in shape. He recalled seeing it before, during the day. Simploff watched the object as they paddled past and then felt the sun was too hot to think anymore. The "Yangtze Gorges" were next in line of interest. He fell asleep, woke in Ichiang, then dozed.

When he woke fully it appeared that he was in the midst of a small lake which had tall granite walls instead of shores. He seemed to himself like an impurity in some god's drinking cup. This drinking cup, he realized, was the chasm before the "Gorges." A strip of sky indicated a cleft in the wall directly ahead and before long the Yangtze narrowed down again, not to a wan river, but to rapids shunting rafted logs and houseboats past his side-wheeler. It was chugging hard against the river full of noise. Coolies at the end of long bamboo ropes were pulling a large junk against the current, their feet stumbling up steps hewn into the limestone walls, their chants from the cliff's black shadows held down by low snow clouds.

A certain "Pillar of Heaven," a pinnacle rising straight from the water, was in the vicinity. But the immediate rocks were made into towers and buttresses and grottos, and further and higher were ramparts, irregular stone battlements, and still further he clearly saw summits covered with pine and all powdered white while just above him the snow clouds rolled low over huge needles, pillared shrines and festooned canopies. All of it was run through by a gentle stream meandering down past broad ledges growing maidenhair, making a half-circle in the middle of Simploff's scene, arching over a cluster

of primroses on an indented ledge and then tumbling off into the river. Simploff wished that he might make a poem.

The primroses were affecting an indifference while resisting the grand forces nature had placed around them. Simploff began to frown on himself as though his ears had heard his head and his heart. "Fantasy," he said to himself in order to define his feelings. He heard the water ripple, then swirl, then it seemed to go still. Instantly a growing clangor arose, and looking, Simploff saw another chanting junk in the current. He added his own voice, "Fortissimo chant of wild men!" Then everything stopped. Angrily he repeated the word, "Fortissimol!" What found its way into his Japanese notebook that evening was only this: "Poets prefer to cry and blush unseen."

But this notation did not conclude the day. He lay on his bunk neither crying nor blushing, but realizing that he knew nothing of poets or their preferences, that whatever had happened would continue to happen the further he went, would become worse, and that a real pioneer, a real Cossack, a real poet—only these could endure it. And his massive knowledge? His intricate thoughts and high philosophies? The more he thought, the finer he saw himself. He was not a poet. He was a German metaphysician with a waddling behind. To think of Grovenka or the beggar made him jealous. He tried not to. Yet he was sure Grovenka had never read a poem. And for the beggar, reading was impossible. They were the same, she the legless and armless of Russia, and the beggar the Grovenka of China. He had to be taken this far away in order to see them. She was no longer disgusting to him; she was the dancing heart again, not quite so vulgar now. He wished her disgusting again. And he wished the beggar were only a stunned heifer, nothing more. "My charts will be important," he told himself in an attempt to break the mood, and saw in a future blur all mankind poring over them midst marveling phrases. "But she and the beggar will not be remembered, they will not have lived."

In the morning they passed through a chasm whose walls, suspended above the river, almost touched on top. Later, when the river broadened and slowed, Simploff imagined the walls falling in upon him, and after, only angular boulders detouring the river slightly, already worn and part of the track for the chanting goat-footed coolies. He reasoned backwards: he should not have gone down the Yangtze, nor have left Vladivostok, nor his town on the Black Sea, his mother's home. But he had been impelled, and this was a fate of some kind,

to define for the world the Szechwan Variation. And yet, in his own Russia, he had gone nowhere and seen nothing.

A little hut was burrowed into a cliff and stuck out from its ledge on bamboo poles. Simploff watched the figure of a man emerge and hoist himself to the top with a hanging rope. The man walked a small distance and then lowered himself with another rope to a bright-green platform no larger than a bath towel. There he began to pull up the greenness from his patch, moving cautiously so as not to be thrown from it. "He accepts the rule of nature," Simploff thought, and entered in his notebook, "What does a poem or a war matter to a man who accepts the rule of nature? He can easily bear with man."

Then the groves of golden and green bamboo, oranges, pomelos and fanning palms which appeared now around the deep-eaved houses on the tops of rocky spurs affirmed the obvious evidence of all man's efforts to outrule nature. The word "Man" itself meant these efforts.

But there was also sun here and the rolling clouds were sparse like lost puffs, so the groves shone as though man had never touched or known them, and they swayed Simploff into a desperate confusion in which there was no alternative but to accept the rule of nature. "Man is a vision only, a dream, an assumption of poets," he wrote rapidly. Then his eye sighted another of those pale arc-objects drifting by. A raft bumped and sank it. It bobbed up right under him, puzzling material, spongy-soft, smooth. "A disbarked tree crook perhaps?" He began to write again, "There are unwholesome creatures on earth who fear and so lie and who think themselves . . ." The object was caught in the side-wheel and squashed. He began another sentence, "Their ego . . ." Then Simploff saw. It was a relic of war, a human arm, hand and all.

Not until the next afternoon was he able to resume writing in his Japanese notebook. Just below the unfinished sentence, "Their ego . . ." he tried describing the green squashings in the side-wheel. Many hours later he put down the word, "*Fini*." It was the only non-Japanese word in his entire notebook. Then, as the Jardine side-wheeler slipped through the motionless Yangtze, Simploff stood abjectly at its rail with his notebook, tearing off one sheet at a time and offering it in his open palm to the night's black breeze.



# FREDERICK P. W. McDOWELL:

## Robert Penn Warren's Criticism

### I

The intellectual force and the spiritual excitement pervading Robert Penn Warren's poems and novels at their best also distinguish his criticism. It has, therefore, greater authority than a canon consisting of so few essays and reviews would ordinarily exert. One need not agree with Ezra Pound that the only valid critic is the creative artist to recognize how valuable, from all points of view, are the pronouncements of a gifted critic who is also a gifted poet and novelist. Warren's critical pieces, then, not only define his theory of literature and give insight into the writers he discusses but also provide an invaluable commentary upon his own poems and novels.

As critic, Warren reveals a sensibility, simultaneously active at the aesthetic and moral levels, which enables him to grasp the essential meaning of a writer and his often unexpressed purpose. Marked by unusual philosophical depth, by sympathy with literature as it reflects the spiritual life, and by aesthetic sensitivity, Warren's work has absorbed the positive innovations of "the new criticism" without being bound by a methodology. As humanist and aesthete both, Warren senses the significance of literature as an art and of art as the most incisive means for comprehending naked reality. For its *aperçus* as well as for its marshalling of argument, Warren's criticism is discerning. Seeking to define in poetry and fiction deep-lying moral issues, Warren also infuses his criticism with moral passion. More flexible than the later Eliot, Warren agrees that the final sanction for literature is ethical despite the fact that it must initially conform to aesthetic canons. Working out of this wide context, the critic must not only be alive to the intellectual dilemmas of his own age but must, above all, see them against the "great modes of the mind," religion, philosophy, and art.

Central to an understanding of Warren as critic and imaginative writer is his exegesis of "The Ancient Mariner." More frankly than in any of his other studies, Warren here combines a formalist approach to art with an urgent sense of its moral relevance. Analyzing the symbols in the poem, Warren finds two major strands of meaning.

The first, that of the "One Life," is omnipresent in Warren's creative work. When it dawns, this sacramental vision of the universe rejects the original sin of pride and self-sufficiency and brings the sinner to union with the rest of creation in humility and selfless love. By embracing this sacramental reality, the Ancient Mariner achieves the same spiritual irradiation which also comes to the protagonists of Warren's fiction. In his own poetry, moreover, Warren broods upon the nightmare of life bereft of such vision. The second basic theme which Warren stresses in his reading of "The Ancient Mariner" is the "value-creating capacity" of the creative imagination, together with the disastrous results of its perverted use. This ambiguity, present by implication in all of Warren's original work, is explicitly dominant in *World Enough and Time*: Jeremiah Beaumont, initially misusing the creative imagination for his own selfish, criminal ends, attains final Grace for his tortured soul through its ministrating power. Sometimes, as with Lilburn Lewis in *Brother to Dragons*, the perverted imagination—a fanatical, self-righteous vision—is so powerful as to annul all promptings of its creative counterpart and to blur completely an individual's discriminations between good and evil.

The vigor and the originality of the Coleridge study lie in its cogent attempt to reach the ultimate meaning of "The Ancient Mariner" by considering all available clues. In this essay, Warren utilizes to productive ends the resources provided by modern scholarship and by the whole body of Coleridge's work itself. Through his references to Coleridge's prose, Warren conclusively defines the poem's sacramental theme, which, as he demonstrates, flows out of Coleridge's own haunting sense of original sin. Basing his discussion upon the inference to be drawn from the stanza in which the Mariner, for the first time, sees the beauty of the sinister water-snakes and then spontaneously blesses them, Warren maintains, as the central principle in his discussion, that there are two facets of the spirit explored in "The Ancient Mariner," the religious and the creative, and that in Coleridge's view they are inextricably intertwined.

Since Warren's central emphasis is upon Coleridge's concept of the basic unity of the mind, his own categorical separation of religious and aesthetic symbols in his exegesis of the poem is disturbing. Despite his cavils against the inflexibility of the allegorizing mind, Warren, at times, comes close to such inflexibility himself. One can accept, for example, as Warren does, the over-all beneficence of the moon in the poem without supporting his tenuous identification of moon-

light with the creative imagination. Granted that the symbolical richness of the poem could suggest this possibility, Warren's own formulation of the moon's significance is too explicit to be convincing—the moon is surely a symbol of the spirit in its fullness rather than of the spirit merely in its aesthetic aspects. In the same way, Warren too arbitrarily associates the Polar Spirit with the “creative imagination,” whereas this presence in the poem is fundamentally a symbol of the Nemesis which tracks down the Mariner for his violation of the laws of God and nature. Furthermore, Warren too rigorously thinks of the sun as a malign agency. When the angelic spirits of the dead fly off to the sun, Warren rather fancifully interprets this as a sign of the fact that the sun must be “redeemed” before it can seemingly rejoice in the Mariner's regeneration.

Irrespective of these lapses into which Warren's need for consistency has betrayed him, the essay does revitalize Coleridge's poem and open new facets of meaning in it. In particular, the study is challenging for its discussion of the fellow-mariners as accomplices in the crime, for its indication of the significance of the various contrasts and repetitions in the poem, and for its interpretation of the hermit as a priest not only of God but of nature—especially in its aesthetic implications—and of society as well. Equally discerning is the suggestion that the revelations which occur in the dream or trance states in the poem represent the truths which are available only to the unconscious mind out of Time but which are indispensable to a completion of our conscious rational lives in Time. The fact, above all, that Warren has been able, through the analytical methods of the new criticism, to demonstrate with persuasiveness that “The Ancient Mariner” is concerned with original sin and with the dynamic quality of the creative imagination emphasizes both the philosophical cogency of the poem itself and some of the more striking aspects of his own thought.

## II

Underlying his criticism is the same sense of modern man's psychic dislocation and spiritual fracture that haunts Warren's poetry and fiction. The integrity of poetry and the wholeness of man have both been threatened by our failure to go beyond the scientific to reassert the aesthetic and humanistic. The inner insecurity and spiritual impoverishment, wrought by obeisance to an abstract, quantitative measure of life, Warren decries not only in the characters of *All the King's*

*Men*, for example, or in poems like "Toward Rationality" ("We freeze from above downwards") but in the criticism as well. In its full realization of this "conflict which our age yet experiences and has made desperate efforts to resolve," Matthew Arnold's work, says Warren, has its chief relevance. The poetic sensibility, Arnold realized, had to struggle for independent expression against hostile forces like a vigorous industrialism, an arid scientism, and a complacent liberalism in politics. That this same protest against the pervasive logical intellect was crystallized early in Warren's career is indicated by his association with Ransom and the Nashville group. His loyalty to their ideals is seen not only in his having contributed to *I'll Take My Stand*, but in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," 1935. Herein Warren strongly supports Ransom's earlier quarrel with the naturalism of the modern age, a naturalism which reverences a God without thunder, a God who is predictably benevolent, and a God whose essence can be precisely defined by the intellect. Rejecting this pallid deity, Warren agrees with Ransom that God is, in reality, inscrutable, that His nature is unpredictable, and that His essence transcends all rationalist attempts to apprehend it. The violence at the heart of Warren's own creative work challenges this flatness of the modern mind, its aversion to the spiritually elusive, and its lack of vital principle. Tensions which explode in violence are more positive, if less "civilized," than a debilitating empiricism. Without sensitivity to the soul-provoking terror which modern science has done its best to obliterate, life is stale and empty. A conviction that primitive violence is more meaningful than timid conformity to convention leads Warren to scorn, in *Brother to Dragons*, the individual of "the pious mind" for whom "our history's nothing if not refined."

To permit modern man to recapture his lost plenitude, to heal the split in his nature between intellect and spirit, the sensibility must become morally as well as aesthetically responsive, Warren declares. Its chief function will be to permeate the unimaginative rationalism of the modern mind to make of it an informed, right reason. In an essay on Hemingway, Warren shows how difficult it is for post-Renaissance man to adjust spiritually to a world which all too often dismisses the workings of the sensibility as irrelevant. In Warren's view, Hemingway himself is a challenging writer because he has, despite our discouraging situation, proclaimed the integrity of the spirit. Almost neurotically sensitive to the intangible values which science tends to nullify, Hemingway, though theologically

unconcerned, creates within a religious framework. *A Farewell to Arms* is a religious book, not through any doctrinal resolution of the modern problem but through exploration of it by the independent sensibility as the most active agent of the synthesizing imagination.

If Warren too simply discusses in religious terms a book whose tone is predominantly secular, he rightly divines that man's general sense of spiritual deprivation in the modern world has religious implications and that Hemingway, throughout his work, has been much concerned with them. In tracing the path from Darwin to Nada, Warren is a bit too expeditious and seems unaware of some of the subtleties in the writers he cites: was the universe, in the end, really friendly for Tennyson and Arnold, as Warren asserts, or did the withdrawn Thomas Hardy ever really have "faith in the constructive power of the secret community"? But Warren's realization that these writers anticipated Hemingway in feeling that the spirit is no longer inviolable in "the God-abandoned world of modernity" is the important perception. Despite its oversimplification, Warren's quasi-historic approach does point up the significance of Hemingway's fiction by showing how inevitably it has been, in part, the result of the far-ranging spiritual conflicts of the last hundred years. The judgments of Hemingway's ideas, his primitivism, his style, and his highly complex irony gather amplitude and authority through Warren's intense conviction that, after all, these are matters not only of literary interest but also of pressing human concern. Another of Warren's central insights is his appreciation of the paradox that Hemingway's anti-intellectualism is philosophical, just as we might say that Warren's own intellectualism stresses insistently the irrational and the contingent in human experience. To Warren, Hemingway continues the protest, implicit in Romanticism, against deadening institutions and the weight of empiric fact, at the same time that he also encourages, like the romantics, the individual's effort to realize ideal human values. If Warren's own ideas are in this sense romanticist, he is also severely critical, in the Coleridge study and elsewhere, of the self-centered idealism which all too often characterizes an uncritically accepted Romanticism. From the best of Warren's essays, we come to realize how fully the philosophical tensions of the last century have contributed to the formation of the philosophy underlying both his criticism and his work as creative artist.

In breaching the dissociation between emotion and intellect, between poetry and science, Warren attests, in his study of Coleridge, to the

dynamic role of the imagination. The concentration involved in the aesthetic ordering of experience has infinitely more cogency, Warren contends, than the abstractly rendered precept. The factual prose of the intellect is simply a less complete expression than the figurative language of the sensibility. Conscious efforts by creative artists to unite thought and feeling become, therefore, the counterpart to those of modern man to regain fullness of soul. Art can be, in fact, of supreme value to the soulless society which too often disregards it.

Because a naturalistic world-view is now so pervasive, Warren realizes that any valid definition of ultimate reality must be reached partly in accord with its tenets. Although modern man stands to lose his dignity by uncritically adopting this world-view, it has nevertheless permanently changed his ideas of the natural, the human, and the supernatural. Naturalism, then, cannot be ignored, but without positive vision it distorts reality. Warren acknowledges in his essay on *Nostromo* that man has his life in nature and must come to terms with it, but must, under no circumstances, as a responsible, ethical being, submit to its domination. Warren's own poems and novels have been motivated, in large part, by this awareness that man is simultaneously in nature and above it: those who reject the natural facts will follow a one-sided idealism whereas those who immerse themselves unreflectively in nature will lose all sense of "the human community."

Despite the fact that naturalism has challenged for most intellectuals the absolute credibility of revealed religion, the spiritual values and symbolism inherent in Christianity are so meaningful, Warren feels, that they must not only be preserved but reasserted. Although Warren has never explicitly professed the Christian theology, his philosophy, is, in the broad sense, doctrinally Christian. If he has asserted the values of a radical Christianity without insisting literally upon its theology, he at least seems conscious of what he has done, unlike so many nineteenth-century intellectuals who ostensibly broke with a traditional Christianity only to absorb uncritically its idealistic ethic. Warren, it appears, is at this point consciously satisfied with Christianity considered as a dynamic metaphor for the interpretation of human experience; and he implies that the question of literal belief in Christian dogma is almost beside the point if one has this more basic sense of the moral relevance of Christian concepts to our lives in history.

• Warren's work is unified by its obsessive Christian sense of man's

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fallen condition: man's sense of glory has been obscured by his guilt, his aspiration has been broken by the "inward sore of self that cankers at the bone," and his assertive pride has been belied by his insufficiency. In modern times hostile pressures like the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the exaggerated individualism and utopianism of the Romantic Movement, and the deterministic science of the nineteenth century have all diluted a radical Christianity and dimmed the light of the spirit. The result has been an inner hollowness which paralyzes. With its concern for his temporal welfare, "liberalism" in politics and religion has both minimized the need man might otherwise have felt to attain this spiritual salvation and encouraged his self-aggrandizement, his achieving an infinite degree of perfectibility by sheer assertion of the will.

The Christian view, as Warren defines it in his study of Coleridge, is neither materialistic nor prideful. It insists that man is not absolute, that an inscrutable God exists on a spiritual plane apart from the human, that sinful man needs to be converted and reborn, and that man's salvation must be earned, negatively through contrition and positively through love. To recall man to his religious heritage, to a sense of his betrayal by "modernism," to a need for humility and spiritual restoration has thus been Warren's urgent mission. Even if traditional Christianity does not, in all respects, encompass the enigma of life, there is no other religion so viable. Despite its having been forced to the defensive, this view of life—impressing upon man a sense of his limitations but encouraging him to thirst always after righteousness and eternal truth—still means the most. It has stressed, in particular, Warren asserts in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," his most recent essay in *The Sewanee Review*, the sacred right of each individual to determine, within the limits imposed by his fallen nature, his own spiritual destiny, to arrive at "self-definition for good or evil, salvation or damnation." Warren's impassioned assertion of Christian values has made him impatient, therefore, with a criticism which treats abstractly of technical questions to the exclusion of the philosophical, and has imbued his own essays with exceptional earnestness.

### III

Though Warren was nurtured in "the new criticism" and helped define that movement through his collaborations with Cleanth Brooks, he is actually more a moralist than a formalist. Convinced that litera-

ture and life are closely related, he goes beyond aesthetic analysis, although he starts with the literary text. To Warren, what the artist has drawn from his experience means more than the methods he has used to encompass it. In the essay on *Nostromo*, Warren agrees with Conrad that "the impartial practice of life" rather than "this or that particular method of technique or conception" moves the artist to creation. Warren goes on to say that literature exists to convey the deepest truth, to come at "the meaning of experience." The "philosophical" writer, the most vital kind to us, constantly attempts to reach "the level of generalization about values." Such a writer's presentation of his values is often oblique and indirect, to the annoyance of the literal-minded reader. But meaningful values of the sort defined in great literature, even if sometimes intangible, alone can sanction an ordered life—they comprise for man "the mark of his human achievement," and in the end, they are "his only truth." Thus Warren in his study of Coleridge has to reject as too constricting the contention of Lowes that "The Ancient Mariner" is mere poetic "illusion" and that its philosophical import is negligible. There is also enlivening substance in the poem, since through its symbols it reaches inward, as every serious poem must, to the artist's most ardent convictions and reflects unerringly his knowledge of life. In these late studies of Conrad and Coleridge, Warren actually reveals, at a more sophisticated level, that same impatience with matters of "mere" technique which had in the early thirties dominated the work of the neo-humanists. Yet Warren, along with other "new critics," had rebelled against the inflexible moralism of these writers.

Warren's essays and reviews in the 1930's dealt principally with poets and reveal an essentially formalist approach to literature. When he did write about the novel, he seemed as interested in technical questions as in the novelist's ordering of values. Later, when Warren, through fiction, attempted a large-scale definition of his own philosophy, as critic he became increasingly preoccupied with the novel and with the moral dynamics, in general, of literature. Warren's earlier, aesthetically oriented utterances are, however, consistent with his later criticism, since he has not so much supplanted earlier attitudes as supplemented them with a fuller statement of other ideas which, indeed, had often been present by implication in the earlier essays. It is to be regretted that, in light of his full development as critic, Warren has never expanded some of his earlier incidental remarks upon Frost, Auden, MacLeish, Jeffers, Cummings, and Hart Crane



into full-length studies of the sort that he has given us for Coleridge and some of the novelists.

Warren's modulation of his formalist emphasis came about midway in his career and is strikingly illustrated in an essay on Melville's poetry. With perhaps too much alacrity, Warren dismisses those judgments of Melville which stress his technical infelicity as poet. They are largely irrelevant, Warren feels, in view of the magnitude and difficulty of the experience Melville tried to master. Since he dealt with the elemental and the impalpable, his failure is actually of more moment than the too easy technical successes of many of his contemporaries.

Because the great poem reflects his deep concern with basic human situations, the writer must necessarily be socially conscious, abjuring all impulses binding him to the ivory tower of mere aesthetic reverie and of mere zest in manipulating his technique. Indicative of how thoroughly Warren's literary theory was imbued with Christian principle is his contention that an unbridled individualism at the creative level is as much to be eschewed as that individualism at the moral level, which, secure in its intrinsic rightness, rejects till too late all responsibilities toward other men. Intensely alive in his poetry and fiction, therefore, to the stultifying effects of spiritual isolation, Warren appropriately insists, in a review of *Princeton Verse between Two Wars: An Anthology*, that the writer and the professor must not work in a vacuum, but must be responsible members of society. An abiding concern for it ought to underlie their work, whereas society in its turn must be made conscious of life-inspiring art and scholarship. That literature is social even in its inception, Warren incidentally asserts in an omnibus review of fiction, 1936: the writer must assiduously inspect the aims of the civilization which forms him and ponder its problems. In his essay on Eudora Welty, Warren implies that an artist can scarcely escape becoming a social force: existing to intensify our awareness of the world and to define our relations to it in terms of his philosophy, he cannot help influencing, at least indirectly, our conceptions of society. Yet, unlike many of the socially oriented critics of the twenties and the thirties, Warren would not, despite his moralist's zeal, permit the integrity of literature to be compromised. He flatly states, in an editorial for *The Southern Review*, 1941, that the absolute worth of a literary work bears little direct relationship to any one reader's specific convictions about ethics, politics, and philosophy and is to be measured, rather, in terms of more disinter-

ested, universal standards. Yet literature is intimately concerned with ethics, politics, and philosophy through the writer's conscientious intelligence working upon them, and he must, accordingly, be sensitive to the thought-currents of his age. To realize the full purport of a poem, one must see that its social and moral values are organic rather than imposed upon it from without. Paradoxically, that writer is most socially astute who is most true to his own vision, as Warren himself endeavored to be, for example, in his presentation of partisan political issues in *All the King's Men*. All told, Warren, precisely because of his acutely developed sensibility, possesses a surer grasp of the sociological implications of literature and a more comprehensive moral outlook than does a social critic of literature like Edmund Wilson, who is more overtly concerned with an author's "philosophy" than Warren allows himself to be.

The values and ideas in literature, Warren tells us in his study of Coleridge, are ultimately defined by perspectives intrinsic to the artist's mind, rather than by perspectives extrinsic to it. The artist's sense of the fact, his harmonizing it with other incidental facts, his subduing it to his inner vision, his transforming it through this vision to a more vital reality count for more than its objective accuracy. Perspectives extrinsic to the artist as craftsman—those of philosophy, politics, economics, psychology, history, and science—provide materials for his shaping imagination, but by themselves they either lack emotional relevance or possess only the one-sided relevance of propaganda. These perspectives, if uncritically resorted to by the writer, will subvert the aesthetic identity of his creations to alien, interested ends. If, on the other hand, he is excited by these materials to achieve for them an appropriate form, he will have ensured their independent aesthetic identity.

With this concept as his standard, Warren judged the work of T. S. Stribling in an essay more important for its partial enunciation of Warren's aesthetic than for its subject. As Stribling's chief fault, Warren notes his tendency to resort to the extrinsic to gain authority for the values that ought, without too explicit formulation, to have inhered from the beginning in the form and texture of the novels themselves. In them, Stribling fails to define his thesis because he is overzealous in abstractly proving it, with the result that he is unable to get close to his material. For an artistic embodiment of value, Stribling's work is not disinterested enough. Warren also establishes in this essay the firm connection between intellectual quality

in a writer and his finished work, and concludes that a residual crudity in Stribling's mind, despite its force, prevents a definitive utterance in literary art. Because his nature is deep enough to objectify his experience, Faulkner is more firmly the artist, Warren states, than Stribling, who fails to render plausible an act or idea in a specific context. Eudora Welty's mind is also far more subtle than Stribling's, with the result that in her work she transmutes the facts of experience into art through the intensity of her inner vision. In his essay on her, Warren assures us that Miss Welty's fiction furnishes the implicit comment rather than the document, the "thing made" rather than the report, the animating idea rather than purely factual history.

Though idea is anterior to the fable which suggests its structure, the literary work, Warren thus contends, attains its insights and conveys its realities through form. General ideas in literature can only be defined in terms of the aesthetic fabric they contribute to, at the same time that form itself becomes an active moral agent in its own right. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man" Warren concludes that knowledge of form, in the end, represents our only valid knowledge, but form only as it is ultimately rooted in the facts of experience:

The form is a vision of experience, but of experience fulfilled and redeemed in knowledge, the ugly with the beautiful, the slayer with the slain, what was known as shape now known as time, what was known in time now known as shape, a new knowledge. It is not a thing detached from the world but a thing springing from the deep engagement of spirit with the world. . . . The form is the flowering of that deep engagement of spirit, the discovery of its rhythm.

Believing so intently, then, in the moral efficacy of form, Warren therefore rejects as inadequate the belletristic interpretation of "The Ancient Mariner," while he simultaneously holds that only through aesthetic means can we discern the wider reaches of literature. Warren accordingly declares in a review of Faulkner's *The Hamlet* that the total structure of the book bears not only upon our aesthetic evaluation of it but also upon our completest moral knowledge of it.

Without a sense for form and its temperamental requisites, intellectual discipline and self-control, an artist cannot reach true distinction. Because Thomas Wolfe lacked a coherent philosophy and because he naively exploited his own ego, his novels disappoint both artistically and philosophically, Warren feels. In particular, they lack the objectivity and the dramatic sense to focus their materials steadily. A well-

defined and powerful fable would have generated its own befitting form and met the demands of structure in the novel, but Wolfe lacked the spiritual stamina to envisage a "correlative" for his inner torment. Even when subjective intensities are less flamboyant than Wolfe's, they are no substitute for intellectual poise. In his essay on Wolfe, Warren has thus definitively summed up this novelist's artistic inadequacies without losing sight of the energizing quality of his sensibility and the merits of the objectively rendered parts of his fiction.

A value, directly presented, is not therefore adequately crystallized: it must preferably be projected in terms of the concrete, of the vivifying symbol. The most complete significance from literature will be elicited, in Warren's opinion, from concentrating upon the most elusive aspect of its form: its symbols and how they interact upon one another to suggest dynamic chains of meaning. To justify his approach to "The Ancient Mariner," he accordingly affirms Coleridge's dictum that through the symbol we reach spiritual revelation—in its comprehensiveness it expresses inevitably the creative imagination, whereas allegory expresses, with its pallid abstractions, the understanding. Warren then quotes Coleridge to show how the symbol unifies the dissonances of experience, and how, in particular, it yokes the philosophical to the specific—through the symbol we have "a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all . . . the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal." In appropriating romantic theory to justify his own intense yet intellectualist practice in poetry, Warren enthusiastically accepts Coleridge's view that the visible world is emblematic of the invisible, that the objects of the sense are symbolic of metaphysical, spiritual facts. In other words, the symbol combines the poet's heart and his intellect, and in Warren's words "affirms the unity of mind in the welter of experience."

Another of Coleridge's tenets Warren agrees with is the doctrine of organic form, a doctrine which emphasizes Warren's continued respect for the integrity of literature. At his most explicit in this respect in his discussion of Eudora Welty, he opposes Diana Trilling for having criticized Miss Welty's "obscurity" without fully understanding her purpose. Mrs. Trilling is misled, Warren feels, because she is apparently arguing from some abstract definition of a story, "some formalistic conception which does not accommodate the present exhibit," and is disregarding the only legitimate end of literature, the increase of our awareness of life by any means the artist chooses to

use. Requiring the artist to conform to the critic's abstract specifications for a literary genre is pernicious if thereby a situation or character in the individual specimen of that genre is not fully evoked—adherence to such a view results, too, in a false standard for criticism. Since each new work of art is *ipso facto* a special creation, it is likely because of its vitality to strain at the leash of any such rigidly defined specifications and, in some degree, to break away from them. Not only does each work unfold uniquely, but all its details are shaped by this God-given uniqueness.

Warren also considers the work of other writers, notably of Katherine Anne Porter, in the light of this concept of organic form. In order to establish a definite tonal unity, a story by Katherine Anne Porter, Warren maintains, will progressively both amplify and refine its themes, and will reject as irrelevant ornament those devices of style which do not contribute to intrinsic effect. To attain such independent identity for each of his works, the artist must coalesce breadth of conception with precision of detail. At both the technical and thematic levels, part and whole, as in Miss Porter's stories, must be inextricably intertwined—each work of art must "test its thematic line at every point against its total circumstantiality." Furthermore, the technical and the thematic must reinforce one another at every point. Using these same ideas to judge Mark Van Doren's poetry, Warren finds that argument in it is too easily isolated from aesthetic context, and that, conversely, image is too easily separable from theme. Van Doren's poetry lacks the indissoluble texture provided by a merging of form with theme and thus, in Warren's view, falls short of greatness. Similarly, in "Conquistador" extraneous rhetorical devices clog the epic mode of MacLeish's style instead of determining its texture.

When symbolical identity has been conferred upon values or "ideas"—by idea Warren means thematic content and not an ideology—they can organize a work of art. When they have thus become integral to the poem, ideas neither ought to be excluded (as literary purists would argue), nor need they be embraced only for their surface meaning (as propagandists would urge). This relation of "idea" to the total configuration of the poem Warren discusses in "Pure and Impure Poetry," an essay which suggests how the most intense aesthetic effects often derive from ranges of experience which superficially seem to have the least to do with producing such effects. If ideas are fully absorbed into the poem, they participate actively in it and provide

for it, by their interplay, a structure. Even from the standpoint of form, then, ideas are vital to a poem despite what the purists say. In promoting the most intense emotional pleasure a great work of art subdues recalcitrant impulses to a total aesthetic pattern. Conversely, by the tensions they generate and by sheer contrast with other less obtrusive elements, these "impurities" impart an added depth. The resistance overcome, the complexity mastered and given its inevitable form is preferable in art to a fragile beauty without substance: "Other things being equal, the greatness of a poet depends upon the extent of experience which he can master poetically." In this essay Warren asserts that even a chemical formula "might appear functionally in a poem," whereas in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," 1935, he thought Wordsworth naive for assuming that science might become meaningful enough, in human terms, to serve the emotional intensities of poetry. This side of Warren's theory accounts for much that is distinctive in his poetry: its terse, tortured intellectuality and its complexities, which are sometimes ineffective through failing to be incorporated completely into a given poem. Warren's mental abundance is perhaps even better illustrated in his later novels. Their growing philosophical force and density can be ascribed to the political, metaphysical, and moral "impurities" Warren has been able to absorb without violation of governing aesthetic precept.

Although such unifying intelligence informs artistic creation at its highest pitch, paradoxically the irrationalist formulations of myth, Warren infers, render values and ideas most immediately available to society, a concept he stresses in his work upon Coleridge, Hemingway, and Faulkner. The active intelligence must always be conscious, therefore, of the irrationalist ultimates that can alone guide it faithfully. That Warren agrees with Ransom as to the artist's need for myth can be seen in a review of Herbert Gorman's *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude*, written in 1928, three years before *God without Thunder* was published. Hawthorne, in contrast to Frost and especially to Sherwood Anderson, still stood in a satisfying, if tenuous, relation to a moral and religious orthodoxy, which, if narrow and cheerless, had enough traditional sanction to enrich it with the spaciousness of myth. As such, it became a suggestive perspective against which Hawthorne could bring to maturity and coherence his own immediate, more constricted experience. As Warren phrases it in the Foreword to *Brother to Dragons*, Hawthorne was instinctively conscious of history as "the big myth we live," and of poetry or litera-

ture as "the little myth we make" within its larger frame. The religious and moral nexus out of which he wrote—he was in one sense its last spokesman—and the productive myth he actualized in his fiction suggest the degree to which too many modern writers fall short of Hawthorne's vision. In the spiritually divided post-Renaissance period, moreover, such allegiances to the archetypal as do exist are frequently spurious, so that Warren's own approach to myth in his novels and his criticism has had to be as often critical as zealous. In *World Enough and Time*, for example, the myth of the Fall, at least by implication, is the informing center of the book, while certain myths deriving from Romanticism—those of the conquering hero, of the spiritual affinity between death and love, of the resplendent pioneer vision of the West, of the eternal return, and so on—wither under Warren's ironic scrutiny because of the varying degrees of falsity in them.

The complex of ideas generating coherence in a work of art Warren calls "theme," which he contrasts with "subject" in a 1936 essay on the novel, "Literature as a Symptom." Whereas a writer's theme organizes, energizes, and elicits final meaning from his creative impulse, his subject enables him to objectify this theme, to dramatize it, and to domesticate it to his own experience. Theme underlies and bestows definitive form upon the particular occasion or subject which embodies it. Although theme, as Warren uses the term, is to be distinguished from a disembodied abstraction—the latter invariably found in propaganda—theme can approach such colorless statement when it has not been entirely absorbed into the concrete. Conversely, subject can become uninspired transcription, a pedestrian realism, unless it be modulated to the deeper urgency of theme. The transmuting of subject to the spaciousness of theme and the symbolic unfolding of theme in an apposite subject is only possible in the creative heat of a unified sensibility which fuses logical intelligence with intense emotion.

#### IV

Basic to Warren's theory of criticism is his conviction that meaning in literature is richly diverse. For one thing, the complexity of the psychology which, in general, underlies literature would presuppose that in literature itself—a highly stylized rendition of experience—a still greater complexity would prevail. For deep-lying human issues, a simple analysis would be untrue to the facts, if not pernicious. In his essay on Katherine Anne Porter, Warren remarks how a paradox of motives underlies any passion and how this tissue of contradiction

permits only tentative resolutions to inner conflict. The moral possibilities of human action, the claims of our disparate impulses, and the intricacies of defining the intangible imply that literature has manifold meaning. As in life the options for conduct are multiple and the nuances of psychology infinite, so in the criticism of a literature truly reflecting life discriminations in value can only be made in the light of these complexities and not according to formula.

Throughout his criticism Warren holds that truth resides in fusing partial perceptions, in discriminating among the ambiguities of existence, in recognizing that intense joy, for instance, has for lurking counterpart intense despair, Warren's theme in "Picnic Remembered." Since, in Warren's view, a stirring poem welds together through the artist's moral passion the disparate facets of his mind, it is not surprising that in his own poetic practice he has been most responsive to the metaphysical poets who were fascinated by the incongruous. In such literature, the opposite impulsions of experience are reconciled, says Warren, through dialectic or through interplay among the symbols used to represent them. Granted that a partial view, if recognized as such, provides invaluable insights, it can become sinister when it arrogates to itself the whole truth. The "education" of Warren's fictional protagonists, for example, occurs when they reject such one-sided interpretations of life for more sophisticated, integral ones. The modern age, in general, has been too one-sided in making a fetish of scientific rationalism and then regarding it as the sole source for value. As long, however, as the logical intellect is aware of its opposite, ceremonial tradition with its instinctive usages, Warren does believe that its discriminations are valid. Their enlightened intellects thus impel Eudora Welty and Katherine Anne Porter, Warren maintains, to assimilate rival concepts to the total configuration of life and to draw from each such concept, without distortion, its meaning. The polarities in life can never be entirely accommodated to one another, since no standard resolution of them is possible. Yet the serious individual, Warren asserts in his essay on *Nostromo*, must persist in these exertions, if he is to discover the secret of his experience:

Man, however, is committed to action. The Heysts, who repudiate action, find their own kind of damnation. Wisdom, then, is the recognition of man's condition, the condition of the creature made without gills or fins but dropped into the sea, the necessity of living with the ever-renewing dilemma of idea as opposed to nature, morality to action, "utopianism" to "secular logic" . . . , justice to material interests. Man must make his life somehow in



the dialectical process of these terms, and in so far as he is to achieve redemption he must do so through an awareness of his condition that identifies him with the general human communion, not in abstraction, not in mere doctrine, but immediately.

In thus bridging through symbol such impulsions as "the dream and the world, the idea and nature, innocence and experience, individuality and the anonymous, devouring life-flux, meaning and force, love and knowledge," Miss Welty's fiction, like Conrad's, possesses depth, Warren declares. It also emphasizes the fact that only within the limits of such harmonized forces is significant effort possible, whereas action emanating from any one of these forces in isolation is misguided. In short, the serious endeavor to resolve the disparities of life will culminate in a rich harmony between God and man and between nature and society, as Warren points out in his critiques of "The Ancient Mariner" and of Melville's poetry. Melville's chief claim as poet to modern critical notice, Warren asserts, is precisely this almost obsessive preoccupation with the "dualities and dubieties" of life to arrive at a more perfect knowledge of God and man. Just this sensitivity to the equivocal in conduct and consciousness distinguishes Warren's essays on modern novelists, as it accounts, too, for the dense entanglements of his fictional characters.

In his account of "The Ancient Mariner" Warren assumes that this thematic richness is vitally present on several levels:

Any substantial work will operate at more than one thematic level, and this is what makes it so difficult to define the theme of a profound creation; the root-idea will have many possible formulations and many of them will appear, or be suggested, in the work.

Warren also cites Coleridge's definition of the imagination as a diversity within unity to argue that the literature it inspires must be allusive. For this reason Warren has rejected, as we have seen, theories of pure poetry because they sin against its integrity even while they proclaim it—"impure" elements in the poetry signify in actuality an increased depth, fullness, and variety. Reviewing Rolfe Humphries' poems, Warren urges that the only admissible "purity" in literature stems from the conquest, not the rejection, of complication. Even all good minor poems will possess inherent complexities despite any apparent surface simplicity.

Aware that some ranges of its meaning may be elusive, the critic of literature will do as Warren himself has done in "A Poem of Pure

Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," his study of Coleridge: he will elicit its most valid interpretation through careful analysis of the text. If men in the past have missed certain inferences in a great work, the reason is that its meaning only gradually reveals itself. Unless our response to a poem is to be rudimentary, extensive criticism of it can alone prepare us for the full aesthetic experience. Until he has composed his poem, the poet himself does not know its meaning, and often he knows it only imperfectly afterwards. The poem becomes for the poet "a process of discovery which objectifies itself as a making"—the poet, the discoverer and explorer, cannot always, however, chart his discoveries and explorations. That this is true can be seen in the frequent discrepancy between his expressed intention—which cannot, however, be disregarded in criticism—and his finished poem. This discrepancy the critic will resolve through his dispassionate yet sympathetic insight. But since all levels of meaning cannot be immediately determined, since, in fact, the scope of the great poem broadens with time, the critic's task is endless. "And for the greater works we are never fully ready. That is why criticism is a never-ending process."

In this same essay, Warren asserts that the symbols of literature challenge the critic most sharply. A symbol is not arbitrary but carries the freight of many perspectives, which can be defined partly in terms of the poet's implied attitudes and partly in terms of their relation to the other symbols he uses. The symbol gathers this massive quality, Warren says, either through necessity—the being implicated in "the great appearances of Nature"—or through congruence—the being validated by the artist's use of it in a special context. The critic will soon sense the fact that the meaning of a symbol is elusive. No one-for-one correspondence exists between symbol and abstraction as in the case of allegory. This indefiniteness of meaning may tempt the critic to dismiss casually the symbolic components of literature unless he also remembers that "the symbol has a deeper relation to the total structure of meaning than its mechanical place in plot, situation, or discourse." The symbols in a poem yield fresh significance to ever closer scrutiny by the critic; all that is in a poem may be grasped intuitively, but it can never all be reduced to rational statement. All criticism fails, then, to the degree that logical analysis cannot duplicate the poem, to the degree that "the discursive activity cannot render the symbolical." Yet through his tenacity, through his ever more precise apprehension of its details and symbols, the critic comes always closer to a complete rendition of our intuition of the poem.

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Warren's own reading of the symbols in "The Ancient Mariner" is, as we have seen, suggestive at the same time that it tends to be a bit contrived. When, however, he skilfully unwinds the tangled threads of Miss Welty's symbols in his analysis of complex tales like "A Still Moment," "The Wide Net," and "At the Landing," he reveals most fully those qualities which account for his stature as a critic: a flexible mind, a discriminative morality, and a sure grasp of the significance of a writer's complete work.

Like the artist in shaping the poem, the critic, in comprehending it, will find internal perspectives most salient. He will, at all costs, heed the intrinsic consistency of the poem, for it alone determines, as we have seen, the authentic ordering of value through form. Purport, for the critic, is not to be fixed in terms of perspectives external to the literary work, since they tend to distort the creative process and to reduce interpretation to a paraphrasable content. Yet, though extrinsic perspectives cannot in themselves explain a poem, the critic may often resort to them to enrich its intrinsic meaning as that is defined in its structure. Among those studies which provide invaluable hints for the critic's interpretations are "the intellectual, the spiritual climate of the age in which the poem was composed . . . the over-all pattern of other artistic work by the author in question . . . the thought of the author as available from the nonartistic sources . . . the facts of the author's life." Notwithstanding its ultimate sanction in the sensibility, criticism is, in large part, rational and utilizes to the full the resources of the intellect and of our culture. More than they once were, Brooks and Warren, in the 1950 edition of *Understanding Poetry*, are alive to the historical background of a poem and to the total contours of an author's work. Despite his preoccupation with the individual text, Warren in his criticism always heeds the corpus of the writer's work as well. In his essay on Hemingway, for example, Warren professes that, with a writer who develops, criticism must scrutinize his whole achievement—his methods and values as they mold all his books.

## V

In manipulating the dissidences of experience and in providing the detachment which the artist needs to make his discriminations, the ironical or skeptical temper is, in Warren's view, indispensable. A good poem, he points out in "Pure and Impure Poetry," survives the fires of ironic scrutiny, because the mastered impurities within the

poem, reflecting the discords of actuality, confer toughness of texture upon it. Simplicities in poetry must be earned, and must be able to withstand what Richards had termed "an ironic contemplation": a great poem is by nature so involved that it contains its own systemic ironies. As Brooks and Warren assert in *Understanding Fiction*, irony both draws out latent details of the conflicts present in the artist's material and makes it safe from his own possible partisan bias. By its encouraging our sure insight into the complexities of life without letting us be seduced by any one of them, a protean irony is strategic for the writing of philosophical fiction, as Warren himself has demonstrated in such intricately conceived novels as *All the King's Men* and *World Enough and Time*.

Precisely this use of an operative irony to define the latent contradictions of our experience accounts for the distinction of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories, Warren maintains. This method is at its most brilliant in "Old Mortality," in which a centrifugal irony comments upon contrasted generations. That an ironic aloofness may be the paradoxical result of moral fervor, Warren stresses in "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony." In this essay Warren asserts that Ransom's detachment springs from his desire to present our discouraging situation honestly and to inculcate thereby the need for a more positive morality than now seems possible.

The insistent presence of this tension between a deeply felt morality and the need to see things truthfully—especially as they fall short of the standards such a morality prescribes—together with the resolving of this tension by means of an intellectually active irony, is the most striking aspect of Warren's own critical approach. An actively discriminative ethical sense supplements Warren's open-minded skepticism so that only in its more obvious aspects is his criticism as detached and tolerant as it seems to be. Warren's compulsive need to find the truth at all costs and his conviction that it is not likely to inhere in any one dogma means that he is both arduous and subtle in defining the temper and the values of the individual writer he may be criticizing. Just as he envisages the creative writer of stature as being aware of the fact that truth lies midway between contrasting polarities, so Warren in his own criticism works from a firm center of aesthetic and ethical reference. Accordingly, he neither rejects all principles nor serves set principles blindly.

Warren agrees with Blackmur that the only valid sort of criticism encourages flexibility and adaptiveness of mind, and a ranging intelli-

gence. Accordingly, it recognizes the virtues of all legitimate approaches while it is suspicious of any one which pretends to absolute authority. Warren was, for instance, as expressed in a 1936 essay on Mrs. Gerould, skeptical of the uninformed "socio-economico-pathologico-Marxist method of criticism" current in the thirties, not because it lacked valuable insights but because its practitioners were intolerantly assured of its rightness. Rather the critic's intelligence must be persistent, flexible, and sophisticated to resist the pressure of provincial ideologies, to assert its basic integrity, and to reach befitting finalities of definition.

In his own critical essays, Warren reveals the great virtues and the incidental defects of this skeptical and ironical bias. It works best in discussing writers like Conrad whose books explore the complex ramifications of the impact of reality upon illusion. Warren's own subtlety of mind allows him, therefore, to penetrate convincingly to the depths of Conrad's subtle intelligence and to appreciate in *Nostromo* the "chromatic scale of attitudes" towards the role of illusion in life, as this is represented by the various characters in the book from Nostromo himself, who idealizes vanity only, to Emilia Gould, who feels a binding obligation to "the human community." As in some of Warren's other critical pieces, the leading ideas in his discussion of Conrad seem more incisive than the readings of individual passages. It is doubtful, for example, whether Stein in *Lord Jim* wishes the "destructive element"—the sea or dream into which a man is born—to symbolize the fact that productive illusion can either nourish or overwhelm. Rather, this metaphor could more simply signify that life itself, though dreamlike, requires an active exertion of the will and a recognition of the fruits of experience to arrive at a tenable idealism. If Warren is overingenious here, he is acute in his interpretation of the "material interests" theme in *Nostromo*. Although he agrees with some other Conrad critics that the silver mine is a corrupting force, Warren also argues that the mine has increased the prosperity of Sulaco and that it could become a powerfully regenerative influence socially, if it were to be controlled by men actuated not by petty material motives but by the selfless idea. Warren has, moreover, perspicuously defined what is undoubtedly Conrad's chief theme: the need for spiritual redemption and the difficulties involved in earning faith in the vitalized idea. Warren's detached, discursive method is admirably suited to an imaginative reconstruction of a writer's whole universe at the same time that it encourages a slightly relaxed attitude which may not always apprehend the terror lurking below the surface of the ostensible facts.

Warren is inclined, therefore, to accept Conrad's professed idealism without recognizing fully the strongly corrosive effects of his temperamental skepticism upon the intellectual expression of his values. Warren's ironical temper in criticism also causes him to underrate the aesthetically plain in literature, a poetry like Matthew Arnold's, for example, from which complication is apparently lacking and which deals in a diffuse, sparse, yet intense manner with philosophical abstractions.

Warren's centrality of vision also results in a perceptive summary of the characteristic features of William Faulkner's work. This treatment of Faulkner is marked by the same inclusiveness that had characterized the remarks on Conrad, but it lacks the focus that concentrating upon one novel had provided for the Conrad essay. Warren's observations upon Faulkner in 1946 were of a pioneering sort, and some of them have since become the truisms of Faulkner criticism: Faulkner's sense of the past, for example, as a repository for spiritual values no longer applicable without strain to life in the modern world, or his use of the Negro as a symbol to indicate the white man's guilt for having countenanced the corrupting evil of slavery. Many of Warren's incidental comments are incisive, the observation upon Faulkner's humor, for example: the fact that it ranges from the robust frontier sort and the Dickensian farcical to that of subdued pathos and sustained irony, and the fact that it affords only a partial perspective leading to other effects. Despite his rejection of the pragmatic rationalism of the modern temper, Warren is possibly too rationalistic in his criticism to suggest fully the Gothic aspects of Faulkner, the livid intensity of the inner conflicts in his characters, and the sheer brilliance of his imaginations. The pervasive horror and fatality in Faulkner's fiction Warren only hints at; and this is surprising in a critic who has excelled in actualizing such experience in his own creative work. This essay, all told, does demonstrate the breadth of outlook and the searching intelligence which allows Warren to pronounce authoritatively upon the whole of a writer's work. Good sense, urbanity, balance, precision of mind, a faith in the informed intelligence, a humanistic sympathy—these are the qualities which provide Warren's criticism with its strength. Warren has thus the same high respect for the supple intelligence as civilizing force and corrector of excess as had Matthew Arnold. This sort of intelligence, Warren feels, can alone elicit that total understanding of literature to which his own critical essays have so signally contributed.

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# NEIL WEISS:

## Swan Lake

*In truth there are but atoms and the void*

Just as a gull in a cage thinks, trembles  
to carrion, quick-beaking eyes of the dead  
and wakes to salt of deprivation, is fed—  
hope is heavy on ice, a grey sky heaveless  
when we with sweater and stick feel air-motes  
in the mouth.

Then the dancers'  
greeting. Mother, they came spinning light.  
It hurt to see her dazzling crinoline, white foot  
in her hand, she whirling not a sound for fright,  
just gentle hissing on ice and a slight spray.  
Then he, to the sky a darker figure and core  
in skin-breech. I saw the slightest bulge  
of mortality.

He was tender  
as myth, smooth skin velour, mother, and eyes  
to soft weep with. Oh, it was an all love  
when, propped on my stick, I saw a third one,  
wicked, finger to his lip, prance in and grin,  
glide between them.

Then the lover sweated—  
as he leapt, he wept, but the tears froze  
him blind while the fiend crackled and kept  
him curling, begging to forgive, then weaved  
once and the girl slid . . . She howled . . .  
Mother, forgive. It was bray of a swan,  
hornweight from cave of functional flesh  
that knows no speech.

And now she was a  
long-necked fat-bellied thing, slapping her head  
on the ice, eyes glazed, thought streaming, caught,  
almost human grief and goad, staying, sliding . . .  
while they rushed to each other, blending,  
four legs in the air hissing—they went roaring  
round, freezing to a bluebeating meteor rage,  
ball of blue steaming, then silvering . . .

Mother, I stay with you.

## The Circus

The bareback rider jumped  
from a jogging horse  
and hung by her teeth—  
I slumped in my seat  
and took her whirling weight.

In the cage, with gun and whip,  
the liontamer gazed  
at the lion through the bars  
of his protecting chair  
held up before his face.

When the wirewalker stepped  
off, and plummeted  
into the net, I saw his leg  
sail over the parapet.

And a man and woman  
on the trapeze, held hands,  
caught and lost each other  
around the knees.

The circus seemed  
no special treat to me.  
Take the grand finale,  
a parade—

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Men were dressed  
 in flapping scales like fish,  
 women looked like powdered moth,  
 the fat man was a tub of jelly  
 flowing on the bearded lady,  
 some clowns weeping in a dish  
 kept right on snapping their pants,  
 whips forced the elephants  
 to kneel, kiss, roll over—the circus  
 was just like any other place!

## FREDERIC WILL:

### Three Poems

#### 1.

Not in any known things, pond, stick, bent-hill,  
 Is finer subtlety than in is and was:  
 But in the head, in that gifted bone, still  
 Copulate old fibers, old cotton-laws,  
 Which, in a modicum of childhoods,  
 Sufficient moisture in the mental fields  
 Will exercise, inseminate, and should,  
 Some softest boll remembering, caress, unseal.

Head's tailor, then, would sit inside, well-warmed,  
 And knit and button at his tightening cloth, until,  
 Inconscient all the while that he'd been led  
 By countless cotton fingers, he would will  
 To be undressed again, and find, caught up in dread,  
 That bone and bloom alike for that lacked skill.

#### 2

Time can well reward, it seems, the hand  
 And heart, paying the one in purpose, and  
 In sinew for its history of doubt,

The other in essential springs, which drought  
 And solitude had closed. Endurance moulds  
 The self beyond its momentary vision:  
 Strength is bound to circumstance, decision  
 To the heart's unguided flights. Man holds,  
 Himself, the barest power with his final  
 Uses, urges for his past the courage  
 And constructions of the present skull.  
 Of such weak memory is made the sage.  
 The moth, at twilight, capable and fair,  
 Recalls the impress of a womb-stitched lair.

## 3

Freedom turns upon a paradox:  
 It must be used effectively; waste,  
 The bent of free energy, withers the fox  
 Circling on the land. Libertine haste

Foils a revolution, acts with hate  
 To prove innate virtue, then receives  
 The scepter. A world retreats. Controls wait  
 In the bowels of states and birds. The gull weaves

Formally concentric rounds, then drops  
 His line straight for the sea's skin. Gulls  
 Live the thought of form. Yet no bird tops  
 The wind so strong or fair. Waste annuls

Even love. Free first-love wants its complete  
 Object, but exhausts its efforts soon.  
 Shunning the aspect, it contrives to meet  
 A reflect of its own delight, a moon.

As for devotion, it will live by laws.  
 It will define its object, fix its aim,  
 Then accept the blood. The blood thaws  
 Rigor, and the man assumes his name.

# GORDON WOODWARD:

## A Sound of Fury

It began the night George brought Mouse home. Until that night Nig had been in the habit of crouching in the shadows behind the big table lamp in the corner. They said that when he had first been given to them they had tried to break him of the habit; but as soon as their backs were turned he had crawled quietly back into the shadows and crouched there, sometimes sleeping and at other times gazing calmly out into the room with his pale amber eyes following every movement, although it was impossible to see him because of the bright rays from the lamp; and they said they finally stopped bothering him and let him stay there.

Then one night George brought Mouse home in a small metal cage with old newspaper wrapped around the sides; and he put the cage on the table and began gently tearing away the old column-type and shoe ads and mutilated but still-readable black headline which said, Storms Forecast, and there was Mouse huddled up in the bottom of the cage like a pink-flecked wad of soft white wool; and then some impulse which neither of them was able to explain then or later caused them to look towards the lamp in the corner.

Nig was watching them, his body still hidden in shadow and only his head thrust into the beams from the lamp so that it almost appeared to be floating, disembodied; and there was something about his eyes and the whole manner in which he held himself which contained the essence of a waiting so long sustained that it was no longer even waiting but a sort of suspension of life until some moment when there would be nothing to do but get up and stand there with an air of almost inevitable calm because that would be the moment.

They said that for several seconds neither of them moved; there was a sudden tension in the room as though the air had become charged with electricity. Mouse gave a short piping squeak of fear and George reached out instinctively and placed his arm protectively along the top of the cage; and in that same instant Nig sprang.

His aim must have been almost perfect, they said; because he landed directly on George's arm and as he did George swung his arm out quickly in a gesture caused more by surprise than anything else and he flung Nig across the room where he slammed against

the baseboard of the wall and then recovered himself and stood calmly looking at them for a moment; then he walked slowly across the room and jumped up on the table and began poking his paw between the bars in an attempt to reach Mouse who had scuttled into the little pasteboard shelter in the center of the cage; and they said that through it all they couldn't seem to do anything except stand and watch with a sort of horrified fascination.

Then George went to pick Nig up and he scratched; he tried again and Nig opened up a long gash in his finger; then he hit him. Nig reared up with his paws outstretched, the claws unsheathed like tiny glinting hooks making short rakes at the air in front of him. George put his gloves on and took a firm grip on the clawing, struggling mass of black fur and muscle and carried him across the room and Ann opened the door and George threw him outside and then stood with his back against the closed door feeling a little shaken by it all while Ann sat down in a chair by the table with her face as pale as wax; because they said they both knew then that they had had a brief glimpse of some horrible violence.

That was in early October; and the same night the first storm of the season swept down on them. By the time they went to bed the wind had mounted until it was almost a gale, driving the rain down in sudden lashing gusts as though someone were spraying the windows with a hose; the shutters strained and rattled on their catches, and the big maple tree in the back yard creaked and groaned monotonously as it swayed in the wind; and through it all they could hear the steady meowing of Nig on the back porch and they said they both began to feel sorry for him because he was out in the storm. They had brought Mouse's cage in and put it on the table beside the bed and occasionally they could hear a soft scuffing noise as he scampered around in the darkness. Then sometime in the middle of the night George half-woke from a fitful sleep to hear Nig still wailing outside and he decided he would get up in a minute and let him in; he fell asleep again.

The next morning the wind had died and there was a cold drizzle of rain falling from a lead-grey sky. They brought Mouse's cage out to the kitchen and gave him some food and then sat at the breakfast table watching him eat with his odd furtive little movements. They said he was very lively, even playful at times, and they felt relieved because they had been worried about the effect Nig's attack might have had on him. Then it occurred to them that they hadn't heard

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Nig outside although he must surely have heard them moving around; and George went to the door and opened it a little at the same time blocking the opening with his legs, and he looked out and then called, NIG! Nig! Nig! And when nothing happened he came back and sat down and poured himself some more coffee. Neither needed to remind the other, they said, that it was the first time Nig had ever been away from home for more than a few hours at a time. They both watched Mouse scuttling around in his cage.

Mouse had been given to George by someone in the Pathological Division at the hospital. They said he had been so well fed and cleaned and reinforced with vitamins and hormones that he had attained a certain degree of refinement; there was something almost delicate in the way he raised himself to reach the one glistening drop of water hanging from the end of the long hollow glass tube attached to a bottle of drinking water suspended in the top of his cage. And yet it had been just that degree of refinement which had been his downfall because with it had come a certain dulling of his basic instincts and a loss of agility in his movements; and one day he had fallen clumsily from the side of his cage and broken his left hind leg which had not set properly so that he walked with a slight limp, dragging the foot a little. But they said it in no way affected his appearance: his coat had a soft lustre to it like spun glass into which his eyes had been pressed like bright tiny beads, and his long tail dragged behind him like a soft pink rubber band as he moved around the cage.

They said that as they watched him they began discussing whether or not they should keep him after what had happened. Ann said that sooner or later Nig was either going to maul Mouse or frighten him to death and so they might as well take him back or give him to some child for a pet; and George said he would be damned if he would. Then Ann said perhaps they had better get rid of Nig, then; and George said he would be damned if he would do that either. He took Mouse's cage and put it on the mantelpiece above the fireplace and then got a screwdriver and some screws and fastened the back of the cage to the wall so it couldn't be accidentally knocked to the floor. He told her before he left for the hospital that if he saw Nig around the house anywhere he would sound the horn when he got out to the car; he drove off without sounding it.

The day passed quietly. Mouse romped happily in his cage making sudden scuffing and rattling sounds of almost unbelievable loudness,

and occasionally a shrill piping squeak. Several times Ann went in to see that he was all right; and once he peered at her through the bars with his tiny forepaws bunched up beneath his quivering pink nose in such an odd way that she laughed aloud. Then about four o'clock the wind started to get up again; the sky became darker and it began to rain heavily, drumming steadily on the roof. Mouse quieted down and huddled in the center of his cage; and finally he went inside the shelter and stayed there.

Ann was becoming a little frightened because the wind was getting stronger; she kept thinking about that big swaying maple tree behind the house. She went into the living room and built a fire in the fireplace, watching it carefully until it was flaming brightly so that none of the smoke would drift up to Mouse, who still remained inside his shelter. Then she sat down in a chair with a book in her lap, although she wasn't reading it or even looking at it, but listening for the sound of George's car in the drive.

Suddenly there was a terrific clatter on the back porch and she dropped the book and sat perfectly still; then she realized it was only the wind upsetting the empty coal scuttle on the back porch, and she got up and went through the kitchen and opened the back door. Nig was standing beside the overturned scuttle; he wasn't even looking up at her but standing perfectly motionless with his eyes looking straight ahead as though he had been standing there for hours knowing that sooner or later the door would open and he would begin moving again; and he moved past her without making a sound, padding with that slow relaxed movement of bone and fibre and muscle like a soft-greased spring mechanism which might at any moment tense and detonate into a fierce-bright explosion of dismembered parts; and he walked into the living room and hesitated a moment with his eyes gazing up at the cage on the mantelpiece and then he made a long graceful leap, his glossy black coat rippling in the firelight, and he landed on the mantelpiece beside Mouse's cage, upsetting a small white figurine which fell to the stone hearth below and smashed into pieces.

Ann stepped forward impulsively and Nig opened his mouth and emitted a steady dry hissing sound, at the same time raising one paw menacingly and raking the air in front of him with sharp hooked claws; she stopped. He poked one paw between the bars and tried to reach the shelter in which Mouse was hiding, then he tried to move the cage, and finally he crouched down beside it

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with only the tip of his tail flicking now and then like a raw black nerve-end and his eyes catching some reflection from the fire or the fading light outside or perhaps from some deep red-gutted fires within so that they glowed like hot amber buds. And Ann didn't do anything then except sit in a chair and watch, wondering how long the waiting would go on if no one came or the phone didn't ring; if it might not go on forever with the glow from the fire dancing in hot fluid patterns along the wall and the room growing steadily darker and Nig watching the small shelter in which Mouse was perhaps contemplating even in darkness that one slightly-twisted hind leg. Then she heard the car in the drive and moments later the sound of George's footsteps coming into the kitchen; then she shouted and he came running.

That night Ann put iodine on the fresh scratches George had received taking Nig down from the mantel and throwing him out again. Then they said they discussed the whole thing once more. Ann said the whole thing was senseless, because one of them was liable to have his eyes scratched out and they should make up their minds to getting rid of either one or the other. George wanted to know how you were supposed to get rid of a cat who had never known any other home, because you couldn't just tell him to go away the way you would a human being; and he said as far as Mouse was concerned he wouldn't get rid of him if Nig managed to pull the whole house down around them board by board, because he would be damned if he was going to have a cat dictate to him what he was or was not going to do in his own house.

He went to the basement and found some old clothesline wire and a large strong hook and an hour later he had Mouse's cage rigged up so that it was hanging a foot from the ceiling in the center of the living room, like a bird cage. Then he let Nig in and watched him as he walked slowly into the center of the room and looked up at the cage and then stood motionless for a moment as though some deep instinct warned him that even he could not leap that ten feet or more straight up in the air; then he walked over and climbed up on the back of the chesterfield and crouched there with his gaze fixed on the cage as if he expected it to plummet to the floor at any moment with a loud crash. They said that was the way things remained for months.

It was a winter of storms. They began in October and showed no sign of letting up as the months swept past and it was Christmas

and then that, too, had gone and they were well into the New Year; they said they seemed to be always going through the violent build-up of a storm or else they were caught in the cold grey ebb of one when the wind had died and the rain slanted down in cold half-sleet; and through it all Nig continued to perch on the back of the chesterfield, although they said he no longer watched the cage except when Mouse squeaked or made some unexpected sound. Every night George put Nig out while he brought Mouse's cage down and fed him and gave him fresh water and sometimes cleaned the cage out; then he would hang it up again and let Nig in who would go back to his position on the chesterfield; and they said things just went on that way.

But Nig had changed, they said. He wasn't the same cat he had been before Mouse came to the house. He had always been an affectionate cat, fond of having someone gently smoothing his glossy black coat, at which times he would lie back and contemplate the world through slitted yellow eyes with just the tip of his soft pink tongue protruding and his whole body making deep soft organ-tones of ecstasy; but when one of them stroked him then, he would merely tolerate it for a few seconds with obvious distaste and finally jump down and walk away until he knew their attention was elsewhere and then he would spring up on the chesterfield again and crouch down as he had been, almost as though he intended to sit there forever. They said he had never shown the slightest inclination to go back to his old crouching place in the shadows behind the table lamp.

Then it was mid-March and the weather became milder; and one morning they woke and pulled the drapes to find the whole countryside bathed in shimmering sunlight. They said they could have both wept for joy because it seemed to be the first break in that long depressing winter with its rain and winds; and even Mouse seemed to be cheered by the sight of the sunlight streaming in the window because he scuttled around inside his cage emitting shrill little squeaks.

Later that morning Ann was walking in the garden basking in the warmth of the sun and watching the steam rising from the moist black earth like pale wisps of smoke, and she happened to glance around and see Nig crouching calmly on the porch rail with his paws tucked under him and his eyes closed drowsily against the bright warm sun. They said that day of sunshine must have been the beginning of something; because from that day on Nig began to spend less and less time on the chesterfield and more and more time lying in the sun on the front porch, or sometimes even curled up on

the seat of the breakfast nook in the kitchen; and finally, after a few weeks, he didn't go near the chesterfield at all.

They said he was becoming more like the old Nig again; it was almost as though he had been ill or diseased or somehow bewitched and he was slowly coming back to them from somewhere. He no longer moved when they stroked him, and once or twice he even began purring with that old familiar soft-toned murmur. They often wondered if he would ever go back to his place in the shadows behind the table lamp.

Then one night George said he was going to see if Nig really had become used to Mouse, or if he was just remaining passive because he realized the futility of trying to get at him. Ann said he should leave well enough alone; but George said he wouldn't be satisfied until he knew, and besides he wanted to move Mouse's cage back to the mantelpiece because it was blocking the ceiling light where it was and throwing a big pool of shadow across one end of the chesterfield. They had just finished supper and Nig was lying in front of the fireplace with his eyes half-closed as though struggling to stay awake. George stood up on a chair and lifted the cage down and then carried it into the kitchen and put it on the table in the breakfast nook; and he kept glancing over his shoulder to see if Nig had noticed him.

Then Nig came into the room. They said they both held their breath as he walked slowly into the kitchen and hesitated a moment in the middle of the floor and then sprang up on a chair about ten feet from the table and lay down, his yellow eyes watching them and every few seconds slowly closing as if it was only by the greatest effort on his part that he could keep them open at all; then he finally closed them altogether and lay perfectly still in that state of timeless suspension and relaxation as though he had gone to sleep. Mouse scampered around in his cage, clambering awkwardly to the top of his pasteboard shelter with his tiny feet making near-inaudible sounds like the soft tapping of dried twigs.

Nig remained perfectly motionless, his eyes flicking open occasionally when Mouse made a sudden unexpected rattling sound; and once when Mouse put his front paws against the bars and peered out at him, Nig opened his eyes wide and tilted his head to one side and looked at him, exactly as he had done when he was a little kitten and someone had rolled a ball across the floor in front of him. They said they knew then that everything was going to be all right again.

The next day George put Mouse's cage back up on the mantel-piece above the fireplace, but he didn't bother fastening it because it had to be moved frequently. Nig showed only the slightest passing interest in the whole proceeding and spent the time curled up on a chair in the kitchen fast asleep.

Then three days later the weather broke again. They said it had been clear and bright when George left for the hospital that morning; and then about three o'clock Ann noticed thick heavy clouds boiling up on the horizon like banks of dark grey smoke, and the air had suddenly become very still. An hour later it had clouded over completely, blotting out the sun; it was so dark in the house that Ann had to put the lights on. Then the wind got up; she could hear the garage door slamming part-way on its chain and the shutters rattling on their catches. George phoned to say that he had just heard over the radio that they were directly in the path of a bad storm and that he was leaving immediately and would be home in about fifteen minutes; he hung up. She walked back and forth from one room to another, trying to calm herself. Nig was curled up in front of the fireplace sleeping. Now and then his ears twitched when a sudden gust of wind blew down the chimney, and once when the windows behind him rattled loudly he raised his head and looked at them a moment and then curled up again. Mouse had retreated into his shelter, not making a sound.

By the time George arrived home the wind was so strong that he had to put the whole weight of his body against the back door to close it; he said that if the wind got any stronger he would have to go out and try to nail the shutters back because the catches wouldn't stand much more. They said they were both a little worried by that time because the wind seemed to be still increasing. Ann asked George if there wasn't something he could do about the maple tree behind the house; and George said the only thing you could do with a tree like that was either cut it down or put a cable on it, and since it was too late now to do either they had better start praying it didn't fall on the house if it did come down. They said neither of them mentioned it again that evening.

Ann cooked supper although neither of them felt much like eating. They were just beginning their supper when the lights went out. George said damn; because that meant the poles were down and they would be without lights for the rest of the evening. He got up and rummaged in the cupboard for candles and brought them

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back to the table and they lit several and then went on with their supper.

They said it must have been about twenty minutes later when they first noticed that the wind was dying down. One of the shutters had broken loose from its catch, swinging back against the side of the house with a sharp slamming sound, but less frequently than it had been. They looked at one another and breathed a sigh of relief because that meant that the worst of the storm was over.

Suddenly they heard a sharp splitting crack followed by a loud creaking sound, like the groaning of a thick rope hawser under increasing pressure; and they said they both sat perfectly still looking at one another over the flickering candle flames and waiting for the tree to hit. Gradually the sound rose higher in pitch; there was a confused mingling of snapping branches and ear-splitting cracks and twanging clothesline wires; and finally a solid earth-shaking whump as the tree hit the ground, shaking the whole house so violently that one of the candles toppled out of the holder and went out. For several seconds neither of them moved; then they both got up and ran outside.

They said that if it had toppled straight over from where it had snapped it would have crashed through the roof of the house and killed them both where they sat; but being a maple tree it had apparently just reached the point where it was teetering when the trunk had split lengthwise so that the heavy butt-end had slid back over the ragged end of the stump and away from the house, ploughing a deep furrow in the garden, allowing only the branches to strike the back porch and wrench one corner of the eaves trough loose so that it was left dangling. They just stood looking at it.

Then they heard the crash behind them in the house; and they both stood perfectly still. They said that was the strangest part of the whole thing; because they both knew in an instant what had happened. It was as though they had been waiting for the crash to bring everything into perspective. They went back into the house, not stopping to close the door, and picked up the candles and went into the living room; then they stopped just inside the door and stood perfectly still, completely drained of all desire to go any further.

The cage was on the floor in front of the fireplace; the top portion had broken away from the base. There were bits of Mouse's food and wisps of straw scattered around the floor; and in one corner of the carpet a small pool of water from the overturned water jar.

Nig was standing in the center of the room with the lower half of Mouse's body hanging from his mouth like a thick white beard, the long pink tail touching the floor and the tiny feet and legs stretched wide and tensed as though they were imitations made out of wire or twisted paper like the stiff pink legs on children's Easter chicks; and they said that just by looking at everything there on the floor you could imagine the whole thing from the moment the cage toppled from the mantel, or was pushed, until Mouse eventually ceased trying to move his plump little white body out of danger with the one leg dragging a little and perhaps throwing him off-balance on the thick-piled carpet, and maybe he just gave up and sat down in the middle of the floor and looked at the beauty of his soft white coat in contrast to the deep maroon carpet beneath him, waiting for the moment when Nig pounced on him.

Nig was still standing in the center of the room looking at them with his eyes catching the reflection of the candle-flames and burning like pale amber discs; and there was nothing about his way of standing there which indicated either defiance or fear, perhaps a slight disgust if anything. Then he moved slowly towards the door, his front legs moving a little awkwardly and his head held high because of Mouse's body dangling from his mouth with the long pink tail dragging. There was a sudden stillness in the room; they said it was so quiet they thought they could almost hear the sound of Nig's soft-padding feet as he moved with that slow relaxed tread across the kitchen floor and out through the open door into the night and the darkness and the storm.

# DOROTHY ROBERTS:

## Dazzle

Light looks from a dazzled leaf,  
Stares like a small sun,  
Glitters, and in the breeze  
Leaps to another leaf.

Light speaks and the morning answers,  
The surest answer from the tree—  
Up, up, up, up and all open,  
But the flight and the song breaking free  
Of the branch answer, answer also,  
And the brightest answer is the eye.

Light blazes from the car windshield,  
Prints tendrils on the shimmering wall,  
Twinkles in the flower cup. . . .  
Up, up, up, up  
Answer the vine and the grassblade,  
The squirrel and the ball out of sight,  
Answer all the shapes broken up  
Into shimmer and shadow. Light

Comes to the eye from the answer,  
Not direct from the fiery core—  
From the kindled pebble under the sprinkler  
To the glittering eye  
That answers with so much seen  
And the blinded "Why?"

Light plays with the chorus of the living  
While the dead hurry down  
Earthward to lift to the dazzle  
Any answering form.

## Cold

My grandparents lived to a great age in the cold—  
 O cruel preservative, the hard day beginning  
 With night and zero and the firewood  
 Numbing the fingers. God could have been in the flame  
 Responsive among the birch sticks, roaring  
 Up through the comforting pipes, and served all day  
 From the frosted woodpile, the continuing flame  
 As the sun almost let go of the bitter world.

But for them He stayed in the cold,  
 In the outer absolutes of cold among the fiery orbits,  
 And gave them the white breath and the blood pumping  
 Through hard activity stringing out the muscles  
 Into great age. They lived in cold  
 And were seasoned by it and preached it  
 And knew that it blazed  
 In the burning bush of antiquity  
 With starry flowers.

## E. G. BURROWS:

### Poem

Nor do I ask why Israel sinned  
 for hanging rags in a grove  
 and ran beside the Assyrian horse  
 and curried the sheep of Canaan  
     for kissing a clay woman.

I have put charms against my chest,  
 a sack of herbs and dry words,  
 and burned the poisons of my birth  
 with a birdsfoot, bone and hair  
     in an empty flowerpot,



slept with the splinter in my brain  
 stabbed Sisera, that trusting guest,  
 and shrieked upon the two-edged sword  
 Ehud sank in his fat foe's gut  
     in the lonely summerhouse.

Why should I question God with them?  
 We had Asshurbanipal,  
 Thutmose of Megiddo, and Rameses,  
 the kings of the shepherd Hyksos,  
     and the naked goddess.

## Expedition

Of paradise is the King of Saxony's  
 bird, of paradise king  
 and lives in the green rain of Papua  
 combing incredible tresses

preening astonishing plumes  
 in the green rooms of rainforest,  
 and I have come to kill him  
 nor care for Saxony's king,

with poison and bird gun come  
 to kill the bird of bell note  
 in a mist and rainbow,  
 bird of the king's paradise,

and wrench from his head the streamers  
 from his wings gloss tufts  
 coral bronze and undersea blue  
 and from his throat the flute.

I must stalk him through rain and mildews  
 for success, a little praise.  
 I must not return empty-handed  
 nor with my hands clean.

But I am sick of the hunt.  
 My hair grows long in pennants  
 and I climb through the green leaves of Papua  
 to a perch among rainbows

where the bird of paradise combs  
 his twin incredible tresses  
 the King of Saxony's bird  
 of paradise, my king.

## THOMAS B. BRUMBAUGH:

### Figure Piece after Chamisso

the fresh-checked keeper's daughter, crowned with myrtle from her wedding, ventures into the lion's cage, and the great ecstatic creature prostrates himself before her. he looks up at the girl, comprehending her deep flood of tears, and allows himself, the faithful one, to be caressed:

"in the old far days we were so happy, like children together. you shook your flowing golden hair with kingly pride, even before you knew me, faithless, womanly and wishing i were still a child with you. but now my stranger-husband bids me follow him, never questioning, to some foreign place. yes, yes, of course, he said that i was beautiful . . . the brief engagement . . . all that is done with . . . myrtle in my hair. and you and i are forced to say goodbye in spite of grief and pain. oh, can you understand? you look so grim in spite of my new suddenly found calm, and oh you tremble terribly. now this last kiss."

her lips touch him, and all the cage is charged with noise and terror. jealously the beast stands guard at the entrance, lashing his tail, while the reluctant bride commands and threatens and then tearfully implores his mercy. the husband screams for weapons, but she ventures near the iron door and him. the angry lion seizes her slight figure, and incredibly, the dreadful spoil lies torn, distorted, and submissive on the floor. see now her master lies beside her, crushed and sorrowful, waiting for a musket ball to pierce his own dead heart.

# M. M. LIBERMAN:

## Fineboned Shoulder and Boyish Arm

### I

When you are a young boy, it is natural, I suppose, to compare other men with your father and to like them—and him—more or less, accordingly. I do not recall that I was not fond of my father, a handsome, serious man with a mustache; but I could not get very close to him in spite of his manifest love for me. Uncle Ed, his brother, was something else, altogether. He was a thinner, younger, less stolid edition of my father. He laughed a lot and treated me as an uncle is supposed to treat a nephew when he (the uncle) has two daughters; like a son, as they say, but without the uneasiness attached to the real thing. No duty, no responsibility. Uncle Ed was concerned only with making me like him and he was not disturbed, as my father often was, if I behaved in a way to suggest that I might not grow up to be a sound man.

When I spent vacations at his home, Uncle Ed seemed bent on being free and easy. The way he couldn't be with the little daughters, that's how he was with me. He would demonstrate his new camera equipment and explain the virtues of a new pipe and, when I was a little older, he would tell me vaguely off-color jokes. He even gave me, from time to time, a half glass of beer. Aunt Dorothy seemed pleased that we enjoyed ourselves.

There were other things, too, about my uncle that made visiting him better than being home. There was the atmosphere of position, of vague affluence. I could feel it especially when I was out with him. He was a dentist in a small community. Everyone knew him. They smiled and waved and called, "Hi, there, Doc." I liked sitting next to him as we drove through town. I knew everyone seemed fond of him and I could feel the good will communicated to me. At times I felt as if I might like to open the car window and shout, "He's my uncle. He's my father's brother. He likes me a lot." Then, at dinner and later there was an absence of care in the house. There was nothing there of the trials of business life brought home and displayed for everyone to be depressed over. Unlike my father's dealings with "the public" Uncle Ed's did not sour him. Finally,

when I went to bed (much later than at home) I fell asleep almost before I could savor the warm feeling of being completely protected.

Sometimes I would get to Uncle Ed's place and find my grandparents Miller there and then I wouldn't have as much fun. First of all, I wouldn't have my uncle to myself and then Grandma and Grandpa would follow me around, directing my behavior with cross admonitions. They, too, showed much affection for me, however. But they gave me a pain.

Grandpa was, in a way, retired. He had come to this country with his father. When a boy, he took to traveling around our part of the state selling things, almost anything, house to house. Later he opened a kind of shop and got a license to dispense glasses and was a licensed optician. He was not really old, but looking back, it seems he was always tired, solemn and withdrawn. I think neither he nor my grandmother knew that there was a kind of life in which the heart-aches, the wants and the worry, could, in ways, be watered down. They were always poor. Grandpa finally closed his shop once and for all, not because he could afford to but because he could ill-afford not to. For a time they lived on what the stock brought after bills and then he went peddling again, this time by bus, but as things turned out, he must have done poorly.

One year, when school had let out for the Christmas vacation, I ran all the way home to supervise the packing of my things for a week with my uncle. It was Friday and on Sunday my parents were to drive me in. When I got home I felt a strange atmosphere the moment I crashed into the house, and after I yelled for attention once and then a second time, I felt I ought to quiet down quickly for it was more than silent in the house. Yet I knew my mother was not out and I found this a little alarming.

I stood for a moment in my galoshes, dripping muddy water on the hall rug in violation of strict orders about leaving them on the porch. Moreover, in my haste, I had left the front door open. The house was uncommonly dark, I noticed, but before I could reflect further on the oddness of things, my mother came downstairs. Her face was a frightful white and her eyes had a strange filmy look. At first I was only puzzled, but when she didn't say anything about the mud or the door and just put her finger to her lips and said, "Don't wake Daddy," I started to cry. She cried too. Then as if on signal we both stopped. I looked up into her face and she told me Grandpa was dead. He had killed himself. On that cold mid-winter morning,

he had gotten off a bus and walked into a lake. He had walked until the freezing water came over his head, filling his lungs, choking the life out of his defeated body. He left a suitcase on the shore and there was a note on it. It said he didn't want to be a burden to his children. My mother sobbed as she told me this and I nearly stopped breathing to listen.

In all the unhappiness which hung in our household I forgot, momentarily, my projected visit to Uncle Ed's. But when the novelty of the death wore off, I felt disappointment.

According to custom, Grandpa Miller was to be buried the next day and I was told that while my parents went ahead to take care of Grandma, I was to stay with Mrs. Tobias. Mrs. Tobias would take me to the funeral.

A family friend of long standing, Mrs. Tobias was a fat, busy, unkempt woman, given to much talking and elaborate displaying of emotion. She had a kind of husband, a little wordless man. She took it for granted that I felt very bad about my grandfather's death. Her drab imagination would have been boggled had she known that, at most, I felt a certain mild compassion for my parents in their time of heartbreak and a great deal of annoyance at my own physical discomfort occasioned by the strangeness of the Tobias household. Moreover, I was beginning to feel that, in the way things had turned out, an injustice had been done to me, somehow. Had anyone realized that my vacation had gone out the window? Nevertheless, Mrs. Tobias persisted in looking at me pityingly and clucking and, in reference to my dead grandfather, saying again and again, "Oh, that poor man, that poor man."

That night I got to sleep with great difficulty, only to be awakened by Mrs. Tobias. She gave me a glass of warm milk, which I didn't want, and said something about catching cold. I was too tired to protest. Before I fell asleep again, I heard her talking to her husband in the next room. "Nobody took care of that old couple. I know *that*," she was saying. "*This* one's father makes a living and *Ed* does even better. It's a shame. I heard he didn't even have an overcoat. He was wearing a thin, little topcoat. They say Ed told him he was going to buy him an overcoat, but who remembers an old father? Not Ed. A happy-go-lucky, but for his father—nothing. He thought he was a burden to his children. Imagine! God in heaven it's awful. It pays to sacrifice for children. Yesterday, it pays."

All at once and for the first time, I felt a real love for Grandpa

and felt sorry that he had died and I cried myself to sleep while Mrs. Tobias talked on.

At Grandma's house, after the funeral, Uncle Ed put his arm around me and tried to smile. "Come and visit us when you have your next vacation, keed," he said. I told him I would but when spring came, I convinced myself I had other things to do. My parents couldn't understand it. I told them that I would rather hang around with my father.

## II

Now, more than anything else I wish I could talk to my father. During the long summer evenings when we sit on the porch and the warm sounds of my mother doing the kitchen chores and a cow lowing at the edge of town commingle with those of an anguished train whistle, he waits. I know he waits for me to say the words I would gladly say, more than gladly, if I knew them. Can anyone understand that it breaks my heart that I don't know what to say? The little, tentative, cautious, almost frightened exploratory thrusts; they mean he wants me to say something that means: father, I know, I understand, father, I can prove it, father, by telling you this or that much about my secret self, the self that I don't know and don't know for a certainty that I want to know; those little cautious thrusts like the embarrassed virgin touch of a boy-lover's hand, only the two middle fingers, say; they bring me more deep-bruising pain than a thousand exacerbated fists and still I cannot say the words and cannot be sure I could say them if I knew them. The pain is great enough to cause me in turn to strike back and the stupid circle of pain and remorse becomes ever wider, a forest fire of pain, guilt and remorse where here and there a grove gives on to an open road, which, when I get to it, closes in a sheet of red in my face as if out of sheer perversity.

He says: Oh stay up for a while, it's early, it's too warm to sleep.

I sit down again. I say: All right, I'll have a smoke and then I'll go to bed.

"Your car running OK isn't it?"

"Yes, it's all right."

"You get good mileage?"

"No, not very. I never did."

"I get good mileage."

"Good."

My mother says: Always drive carefully. Lots of crazy people on the road.

I'm tired. All day I've read. My eyes are like two pits of sand. New books have come from New York and last night I dreamt that I was locked in a room lined walls and ceiling with books and I was not worried about how I could get out, only about how I could read all the books, all the books in the world.

I have said to him: I read because it's important to me. I don't read because I have nothing better to do, because it's summer and I'm home. I read because it gives me more pleasure than anything in the world (not quite the truth but as much truth as there is for my father: do you understand that it grieves me that I don't know the truth for my father?).

"Your mother thinks you're bored."

"I read because I like to read."

"She thinks you should be out with young people."

"I like to read."

"She thinks you're worried about something."

"Oh for God's sake."

"She thinks something's bothering you you're not telling us."

"For God's sake nothing's bothering me and if there were would you expect a man my age to tell you about it?"

"It's your mother. You know I don't interfere in your affairs. I don't worry."

"I like to read."

"I understand. It's your mother."

"Ah, you're as bad as she is. Jesus Christ I'm going to bed."

She says: Gordon.

He says: OK, OK, I'll sit here alone.

I say: Mother's here.

He says, "She's tired. She'll be going to bed in a few minutes too, but g'wan, I don't care."

"You're always doing that."

"What?"

"Making me feel as if I'm deserting you. Making me feel ashamed. Here I want to go to bed and you won't let me go without making sure I feel rotten about leaving you alone."

Mother says, "Gordon, you talk like a ten-year-old. He doesn't care if you go to bed. G'wan if you want to go to bed. Nobody's stopping you. We'll all go soon."

"I've been trying to go to bed for the last half hour. Every time I get up he says what's your hurry, it's hot, it's early and he looks at me as if I were deserting him, abandoning him. He gives me that hurt look."

"Ah, what in hell are you talking about?" he says. "For God's sake go to bed. What do you want from me anyway?"

To her: "Ever hear such a thing? Just wanted to talk to him a little bit. What did I do?"

In bed I turn and fret until I see a stairway going up, up and then down into my sleep where the steps are impossibly wide and soiled and are at crazy angles to the damp, cracked walls of an old movie-house. Here my father is young and peacefully, plainly happy and handsome, the small handsome man of my earliest recollections in which he is carrying a bag of pop-corn as we go into the enormous side-street door, past gorgeously colored posters of a man in green, carrying a sword and leaping over a wall to a girl standing demurely in the middle distance. At the foot of the stairs, my father, a very young man with a black mustache, tells me we want pop-corn, don't we, and he gives the man behind the little black case something and laughs and hands me an oily paper bag and smiles, he is so happy to be with me, more loving than when he comes home at night and frowns and complains that it is impossible to make a decent living. I look at Doug Fairbanks look at the girl on the wall and push my hand into the oily bag and my father nibbles from the top of his, all the while looking at his son, not the stairs, and he stumbles and falls flat and hard on his stomach while his hands and feet are out in all directions like a crab and the pop-corn bounces like a battalion of bugs and the ticket taker at the top of the stairs and his companion laugh so hard they are nearly in tears and I hate them so fiercely I nearly cry too and inside I soon tire of Robin Hood. The evening is ruined for me in the pop-corn and sweat stink of the Happy Hour. I try to lift my head off my chest to look at Doug in the funny tight suit and then at the man next to me, my father, who is watching the screen as if he has forgotten me and I do my best to stay awake and then suddenly I am bolt upright having heard the outraged scream in the next room and my mother's voice saying you had a nightmare, Ben, and my father saying I saw my father in the water.



# WILLIAM BYSSHE STEIN:

## The Moral Axis of "Benito Cereno"

For over twenty-five years the secret to the meaning of "Benito Cereno" has lain buried in a familiar academic grave—a study of the source of the story.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, all Melville scholars know of its existence, and perhaps each, at one time or another, has consulted the article in some vague turn of curiosity. But no one has, to my knowledge, attempted to collate the historical parallel with the story proper—that is, in a meaningful act of criticism. In the execution of this purpose one would seek to explain the rationale of Melville's changes of and additions to the original account of the phase of the voyage given fictional treatment. Such an endeavor would center on the concrete materials with which his creative imagination worked. This effort would, in effect, provide an insight into his narrative purpose. This essay proposes to define this one perspective of the story.

### I

Melville's selection of the particular sequence of scenes from the historical source first requires scrutiny. Here the moral incipience of the dramatic situation apparently attracted him. If he had been interested primarily in the sensational aspects of the experience, he naturally would have picked the exciting episode of the mutiny. Instead he preferred to focus on the spiritual and physical dilemma of the Spanish captain, as actualized in the satanic deception of the Negroes after Amasa Delano had boarded the floundering ship. Several factual details in the historical account—data which had an irresistible appeal for Melville's imagination—also integrated with this narrative purpose, especially the symbolic adumbrations of the names Amasa and Benito. His familiarity with the Old Testament enabled him to see the astonishing parallel between Delano's danger on the *San Dominick* and Amasa's treacherous murder by Joab.<sup>2</sup> Benito, in its easily demonstrable

<sup>1</sup> Harold H. Scudder, "Melville's *Benito Cereno* and Captain Delano's *Voyages*," *PMLA*, XLIII, (June, 1928), 502-532.

<sup>2</sup> See II Samuel 20:9-10.

connection with "blessed," permitted him to anchor the action in a biting irony of tone.

Melville's further alterations of the historical account extend this statement. To strengthen the contrapuntal relations of these personal names to the basic religious orientation of the action, Melville deliberately changed the names of the ships found in his source. The subtle change of the Spanish ship from *Tryal* to *San Dominick* speaks for itself. Etymologically, Dominick means "belonging to the Lord." Thus the ship is symbolically transformed into the dominical vessel of Christ with Benito as its commander. With the ship's name Melville quietly advises the reader to anticipate a thematic development centering on the idea of Christian salvation. The substitution of *Bachelor's Delight* for the American ship's name of *Perseverance* is part of the same design. The mutation reflects the unrelatedness and irresponsibility of Delano's moral command, symbolically an authority without vital ethical sanction. This interpretation evolves logically from Melville's cutting disparagement of the bachelor in "The Paradise of Bachelors," with all its implications of vicarious eroticism: the bachelors who go "two by two and arm-in-arm . . . to their neighboring chambers to turn over the *Decameron* ere retiring for the night."<sup>8</sup> This view of Delano is consistent with the atmosphere of irony which envelops the story, for at every turn Melville is disposed to mock his spiritual awareness so as to control the sympathies of the reader. This is evident in the first comment on Delano's character:

Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good-nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated incentives, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.

Thus Melville invites the reader to share his amusement, at the same time calling attention to the name symbolism. Nor is this the last phase of it, for in the course of the story he ingeniously manipulates an increasing number of appellative details.

<sup>8</sup> *Selected Tales and Poems*, ed. Richard Chase (New York, 1950), p. 214.

His additions to the historical materials also betray a desire to color the moral situation with a deeper religious tint. He accomplishes this by skillful insertions of sacred imagery. As the *San Dominick* looms through the morning mist, an unequivocal "matin light" bathes the cabin of the ship, and its superstructure is "wimpled by . . . low, creeping clouds, not unlike a Lima intriguante's one sinister eye . . ." In the juxtaposition of the matin light and the metaphor of the wimpled conspirer, the subversion of the holy is figuratively broached. On the literal level of the plot it anticipates the assault of Babo's malevolence on Benito's faith in the power of Christian redemption. Symbolically the divine is depicted under the incubus of evil, for, in another sacred perspective, this is the time of the day which inaugurates the first of the canonical hours of the Divine Office—the daily services and prayers offered by the church in praise of the redeemer. From another direction Melville encourages the belief that the dominical vessel of Christ is in danger.

Delano's first impression of the *San Dominick* extends this idea. He envisages it in an image of "slovenly neglect":

. . . a white-washed monastery after a thunderstorm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees. But it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him. Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowl; while, fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters.

Another dimension of the dominical symbol is also obvious in this passage. The Black Friars are Dominican brothers, and Delano's ironical hallucination, his vision of the Negroes as Black Friars, is, in context, a blasphemous pun suggesting that the dominical ship of Christ is manned by impostors.

This association is legitimate in view of Melville's preoccupation with the Manichaean heresy, and it is inevitable when analyzed in connection with St. Dominic. The latter, historically, implemented the holy war which led to the extermination of the extreme Manichaean sect, the Albigenses. His role in the fanatical crusade—at least in the stress that would appeal to Melville—was in the office of Inquisitor. Apocryphally, he ruthlessly and inhumanly sentenced thousands to death. Though they believed in a radical dualism in which God

and Satan shared equal power in the universe, they aroused the wrath of church authorities more because they denied the necessity of an organized ecclesiastical empire. A rigid Christocentrism characterized their beliefs. One could achieve salvation without the intercession of the church if he became ascetically perfect. Then he needed only to take up his cross and follow Christ. This tenet, of course, correlates with the motto on the bow of the *San Dominick*: "*Sequid vuestro jefe*" (Follow your leader), a crucial addition to the historical text. Thus the collective associations hint of a conspiracy against the dominical ship of Christ, not however without a note of frosty irony, the imputation that the church discourages a complete faith in the Saviour.

Authority for this interpretation is provided in the allusion to the construction of the *San Dominick*, whose "keel seemed laid, her ribs put together, and she launched, from Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones." The context of this image in the Bible generates still another reverberation of Christ, further evidence of Melville's Christocentric emphasis. This chapter in Ezekiel contains one of the most famous of the Messianic prophecies which begins with a condemnation of the spiritual reality of the Israelites: "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts." A resurrection for the dry bones is prophesied, however, with the coming of the Saviour and devotion to his ideals: "And David my servant *shall be* king over them . . . ; they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them."<sup>4</sup> So too, Melville later points out, may Benito experience a rebirth; he needs only to follow the leader of the dominical vessel.

Melville invokes two other images in his description of the *San Dominick*, both of which tie up with the Biblical quotations. On the stern, the medallioned shield of Castile and Leon adjoins a mythological device of a satyr subduing another writhing masked figure. Here Melville refers to Ferdinand I of Spain. The latter united the two warring provinces of Castile and Leon under the rule of Christendom during the Middle Ages. This same emperor was also known as *El Magno*, "the King of Kings," whose rout of the Saracens, and whose profound piety magnified him into a legendary soldier of Christ. In contrast with this patent allusion to the Saviour, the figure of the satyr, an antichrist, inverts the meaning of the Spanish coat-of-arms: the power of Christ is in descendance. The dramatic struggle with evil, in accordance with the vision of Ezekiel, can only be resolved

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 37:11, 28.

through fidelity to the redeemer. In effect, Melville asserts that only the deep and dynamic faith of a Ferdinand I can master the forces of Satan which have always challenged the world of Christendom.

The key to this mystery of faith is ironically pictured in the scrawled letters beneath the canvas covering the figure-head of the ship: "*Sequid vuestro jefe.*" On the literal level of the plot this is Babo's way of intimidating the Spaniards on the ship, for underneath the canvas lie the bones of Alexander Aranda, riveted to the bow. Melville later clarifies the significance of this mock crucifixion in the documentary epilogue to the story, a revised portion of the historical text. He indicates that the ship's proper figurehead is "the image of Christopher Colon, the discoverer of the New World." The insertion of this phrase is an unquestionable rubric—a warning to the reader that he must interpret it in the context of the symbolic crucifixion. If one is to follow the leader, he will follow Christopher, etymologically "the Christ-bearer." Thus to discover "the New World" will be to discover the new Jerusalem—the new world of the spirit. And with this image Melville tightens the design of his name symbolism, giving it a climactic orientation. Along with the previous alterations and additions of religious and historical imagery, he urges an interpretation of "Benito Cereno" in the framework of the traditional redeemer myth of Christianity.

## II

With all the *conscious* effort reflected in the integration of the diverse image correlatives, it seems logical to assume that Melville intends the redeemer myth to determine the symbolic roles of his main characters. The myth does precisely this, and its medium is verbal and situational ambiguity. Delano's thoughts, for example, invariably cast doubt on the reality of things seen. He is prone to reiterate that what he observes appears to be an enactment of a mysterious drama: ". . . possibly master and man, for some unknown purpose, were acting out, both in word and deed, nay, to the very tremor of Don Benito's limbs, some juggling play before him . . ." He attributes to the latter that "strange ceremoniousness . . . not uncharacteristic of one playing a part above his real level." Literally this is true. Benito plays the part of the *mock host*. And the last word is repeated again and again, as if Melville were importuning the reader to take cognizance of its strange context. Its usage is inconsistent with nautical language; instead its overtones are jarringly

ironical. *Host*, then, becomes a rigid reading direction on the symbolic level of the story.

Against the background of the redeemer myth, the part Benito plays is the role of the mock Christian host. A false Christ, he is unable to cope with the physical suffering, the spiritual anguish, and the bitter ignominy of circumstance in which he is called upon "to follow [*his*] leader." His soul is not enlightened spiritually by unbearable suffering. He forgets the injunction of the Saviour, the Man of Sorrows in the Gospels, whose earthly life culminated in an agonizing death: "If any man will *come after Me*, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow Me*. For whosoever wishes to save his life shall destroy it."<sup>5</sup> The records of the New Testament testify to a prevailing sense of human misery akin to Benito's, but they do not sanction a cowardly retreat into the inertia of fear. The Spanish captain ignores the stringent caveat of faith in Christ: "if the world hate you, ye know it hated me."<sup>6</sup> Delano, whose symbolic role is that of an initiate in the ritual presentation of the host, similarly exhibits physical and moral cowardice. He is never able to transcend thoughts of his own safety and death. He too is oblivious to the message of the cross that a God of mercies comforts the individual in every situation so that he may be enabled to comfort others in need of succor. But this conviction of Christian faith is beyond the reach of Delano.

Melville's manipulation of the symbolic roles of Benito and the American points logically to Alexander Aranda's part in the drama. As owner of the dominical vessel, he is the true Christ. Since his "dry bones" are nailed above the motto, he must be associated with the redeemer image. Significantly, it is Alexander Aranda who, in the words of the mock host, permits the slaves, the tools of pain and sorrow aboard the Lord's vessel, "to range within given bounds at their pleasure." Thus evil, as an active force in human life, reigns at the pleasure of the Saviour in order to test the moral and spiritual integrity of anyone who professes to follow His teachings.

Out of this grant of freedom grows the next development of the redeemer myth. In the Passion enacted before Delano's eyes, Melville stages a mock presentation of the host, a parody on the sacrament of the Eucharist. He supports it by interpolative imagery: "things exhib-

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:24-25. Italics are mine. They indicate Melville's probable reason for choosing the motto of "follow your leader."

<sup>6</sup> John 15:18.

ited," "acts done," and "things said." In other words, the traditional *symbola* of the Christian rite of Communion, hideously inverted, are held up to view. Delano's spiritual response to this ceremonial performance is a travesty of faith. By fits and starts of bland credence in a divine providence he contemplates the inconsistent hospitality of the host; and, when moved to doubt about his own security, he perfunctorily addresses himself to the heavens: "Too nonsensical to think of! Who would murder Amasa Delano? His conscience is clean. There is one above." On other occasions Melville, to sharpen the profile of the captain's moral hypocrisy, exposes him in another angle of light: "it was with captains as with gods; reserve, under all events, must still be their cue." It is not for Delano to read the prophecy of the Saviour which, symbolically, an old Spanish sailor offers him in a knotted Gordian rope. This is the knot which Alexander the Great severed at the temple of Ammon where he was proclaimed a saviour by the priests of the sun. No, in this instance the knot is undone by a Negro; the secret of the redeemer is for him a Christian mystery in the literal sense. This symbolic ambiguity of deity is depicted in even more ironical terms. Viewing Benito's lack of control over the Black Friars, the American can think of "no sadder plight than a commander who has little of command but the name." And, of course, this remark simply reflects Delano's appalling spiritual stagnation—the vague image of Christ that he carries in his soul.

In a dramatic tableau Melville accentuates still further the latter's insensitivity to intimations of Christianity. Catching a glimpse of Benito in the iconographic position of Christ in a sacred stereotype, he is inexplicably moved to silent reverence, for looking

over once more towards his host—whose side-face, revealed above the skylight, was now turned towards him—he was struck by the profile, whose clearness of cut was refined by the thinness incident to ill health, as well as ennobled by the beard. Away with suspicion. He was a true off-shoot of a true *hidalgo* Cereno.

Again Melville plays with the disturbing implications of a name; Cereno, in the context of the last sentence in the passage, refers to serenity or peace; and the entire metaphor seems to be a paraphrase of the gospel verse: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."<sup>7</sup> In addition, the dramatic situation which it encompasses

<sup>7</sup> John 15:1.

parallels the scene of pain and anguish which Delano observes. But for Delano there is no spiritual insight. As the Biblical analogue suggests, there is only barrenness and sterility where the branch is cut from the vine; the true vine is only a shadowy memory in Delano's soul.

The religious charade that Melville enacts before Delano is, in its inception, perhaps based on a historical coincidence in the source—a detail which knitted unobtrusively into the design of the adaptation. The *San Dominick* is headed for the island of Santa Maria at the time she is boarded by the American. Here, literally, "they might water easily," but in the symbolic sense Melville apparently sees in this part of the voyage a quest for rejuvenation—in terms of the narrative Delano's opportunity to achieve spiritual enlightenment, as the Virgin Mary's Son offered grace to His followers.

The profane burlesque of the Eucharist which now ensues is disguised in the most innocent of intercalations to the original manuscript—the barbering episode and the meal thereafter. In setting the scene for these incidents, Melville slyly stresses their ritualistic practice, emphasizing another recurrent epithet in the story, one likewise associated with Christ—namely *master*: "Master told me never mind where he was, or how engaged, always to remind him, to a minute, when shaving time comes." Not content with this explicit rubric, Melville proceeds to sketch in a sacred background for the rite, albeit shoddy and disreputable as befits his purpose. On one side of the cuddy into which Babo forces the mock host, in contiguity with cutlasses, harpoons, and tattered rigging, "like a heap of *poor friars' girdles*," is a devil-marked "claw-footed old table lashed to the deck; a *thumbed missal* on it, and over it *a small, meagre crucifix . . .*" What uglier image of the depravity of the holy can be painted? None, perhaps, unless, like Melville, one adds the final crushing detail: "Opposite was a cumbrous washstand, of black mahogany, all of one block, with a pedestal, like *a font*." Delano is not unimpressed with what is exhibited; in the strange there is something familiar. "Looking around," he observes, "'this seems a sort of dormitory, sitting room, sail-loft, [*and*] chapel.'" And a Christian house of worship it is, with the emblem of the Trinity: "The further extremity of the cuddy . . . was pierced with *three openings*."

Next Melville describes the consecration of the putative host. Benito is swathed in a king's banner. This preliminary rite of investiture • bristles with trenchant irony, and at the same time lends unequivocal



proof to the tight axial structure of the imagery which supports the weight of the literal narrative. The devices of this bunting, "the castle and the lion," constitute another allusion to Ferdinand I, who established the reign of Christianity in Spain. The nature of this sacrilege is thus twofold, a desecration of both the temporal and eternal symbol of Christ over the forces of evil. Captain Delano's reaction to this apostasy displays the brilliant subtlety of Melville's verbal ambivalence: "'Why, Don Benito, this is the flag of Spain you use here. It's well it's only I, and not the King, that sees this, but *it's all one, I suppose . . .*'"

The *symbola* of "acts done" now takes the form of a rite of castration. Babo rests Benito's chin in the "font," and the trimming of the beard and chin begins. Though at first glance innocuous, this act is another detail pregnant with ceremonial meaning. Melville certainly could not forget the equivalent incident in the story of Samson. In this scene Benito is deprived of his strength to contest evil, and the covenant of surrender is sealed with blood vindictively drawn from his chin. This blood sacrifice, a parody on the voluntary offering of the host, also provides Melville with the chance to further delineate Delano's myopic perspective on the life of the spirit and Benito's inability to remember the redemption promised in the blood of Christ. The latter recoils from Babo's razor in terror while Delano, despite the obvious anguish of the host, mutters callously about his inability to "'endure the sight of one little drop of his own.'" Such were the derisive remarks that Christ heard on the cross, likewise the product of a spiritual obtuseness similar to Delano's. But Babo's comment on the affair cogently summarizes Melville's attitude towards both men: "'But answer . . . please, master, while I wipe the ugly stuff off the razor.'"

So studied and precise is Melville's description of each step of the ceremonial barbering that, even in a hasty reading, one is compelled to pause and wonder. The gestures of Babo, in particular, betray a priestly formality, contrasting vividly with the prosaic actuality of the service being performed. Delano's uneasiness is therefore aggravated; he is baffled by the mysterious proceedings: "What could be the object of enacting this play of the barber before him? At last, regarding the notion as a whimsy, insensibly suggested, perhaps, by the theatrical aspect of Don Benito in his harlequin ensign, Captain Delano speedily banished it." The unusual ritual culminates when Babo "bestir[s] himself with a small bottle of scented waters, pouring

a few drops on the head." This act of sanctification, symbolic of the incensing which precedes the elevation of the host, prepares for Melville's Eucharistic meal.

Melville asks the reader to witness a shocking inversion of the communion meal in which the relative positions of the protagonist and the antagonist at the betrayal supper are transposed. Babo deploys the host into place, and the mock ceremony commences. One can judge Melville's intention here only by reference to his other versions of the *agape* in "The Two Temples" and "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," four mutually related stories which, in a devolving series, trace the degradation of the Communion Sacrament into a bestial charity meal for the starving poor. In all the stories, just as in the one under discussion, he takes note of the fact that the external act of eating the common meal, as practiced in primitive Christianity, symbolized the mystic infusion of the spirit of Christ into the participants. In essence, the Last Supper gave Christ the opportunity to announce His forthcoming death and His willingness to sacrifice Himself. The sacrifice itself was the basis of the new covenant and Christ in this manner requested similar service from His followers if His mission on earth was to be realized. Contrasting the assumptions of Christ with the behavior of Benito in an identical situation, one perceives in the latter's reenactment of the passion aboard the dominical vessel the grotesque disintegration of the spiritual legacy of the Saviour: "the host sat silent and motionless," paralyzed by a vicarious reminiscence of the physical and spiritual tribulations of the passage on the *San Dominick*. Literally and symbolically, he betrays his religious heritage—his role as host. Melville, in this portion of the narrative, invokes the word persistently, drumming an awareness into the eyes and ears of the reader that is beyond the requirements of mere rhetoric. It is not to be expected that Melville would utilize every movement of the eucharistic rite. As his additions to the historical manuscript demonstrate, he merely intends to create a pattern of ceremonial practice, the main features of which ought to be familiar to anyone who professes even the slightest knowledge of Christianity and its history. The dominical vessel and the host more than accommodate even the most dismal ignorance.

Ultimately, the black priest who supervises the entire rite crowns the stinging mockery of Melville's religious charade. Babo, dissimulator extraordinary and devil nonpareil, usurps the position of Christ. Beyond the effect of his malevolent influence on Benito, his gulling

of Delano is also of extreme importance. Melville is able to reveal the latter's spiritual insensitivity—his lack of soul culture. Despite his vague intuitions into the ritual mask, he inevitably lapses into complacency. Even when instinct warns him, he is quick to rationalize his fears. Startled by the ringing of "the flawed bell" of the dominical vessel, he recoils in horror: "In images far swifter than . . . sentences, the minutest details of all his former distrusts swept through him." Like Bannadonna in *The Bell-Tower* he is deaf to the call of Christ which the bell symbolizes.

Melville, a moment later, in a direct allusion to the Last Supper, offers sanction for the ritual interpretation of the previous action. Delano, again aroused to suspicion, imagines himself the victim of a sinister plot in which he parallels the Spaniard with the "Jew, who refrained not from supping at the board of him whom the same night he meant to betray." In the midst of succumbing to this dark distrust of the host, he chides himself for having "betrayed an almost atheist doubt of the ever-watchful Providence above." Yet on the heels of this thought he forgets Christ once more; the outer act, not inward purity of impulse, determines his moral values: "Ah, thought he, after good actions one's conscience is never ungrateful, however much so the benefited party be."

Symbolically, his darkness of the soul is equated with the disappearance of the sun into the deceptively "innocent repose" of the evening. The darkening of the physical world enables Melville to achieve a subtle structural balance. For, as indicated earlier, Delano first observes the *San Dominick* bathed in "matin light," an ingenious emblematic insertion designed to arouse man to the worship of Christ. It deepens the irony of the concluding image of "the flawed bell," the call to vespers devotions. The dominical ship is indeed in danger. In a symbolic movement from light to darkness the sway of evil is announced. Melville stresses this aspect of the moral drama in the farewell between the two captains: "Don Benito would not let go the hand of Delano, but retained it in his, *across the black's body*." In this cross which the clasped hands make with Babo's body, an inversion of the crucifixion is symbolized since Benito permits Delano to depart without warning him of the danger which impends. Selfishness is substituted for selflessness.

In this climax of denial Christian faith and hope are renounced. Benito fails to follow the leader. His pitiable moral decadence is symbolized in an external image of fear—the human skeleton of death

on the bow which Babo unveils in another of Melville's gestures of mockery. This crucified body affirms his allegiance to the temporality of life and the dominance of evil. The myth of the redeemer is thus reduced to a plan of salvation without meaning to man. The rescue of Benito proves this point. It is a dramatic device utilized by Melville to enhance man's obsession with the safety and security of his physical body. The fate of the soul is lost sight of in man's subjective imprisonment in phenomenal existence: physical suffering triumphs over spiritual fortitude. The Christian Saviour in "Benito Cereno" is relegated to the limbo of all the pagan redeemers who preceded him. His redeeming power is dead *in man*.

The triumph of physical evil over the eternal values of the spirit is repeated in Babo's symbolic exaltation in the square of Lima—Melville's heretical elevation of the host of the devil: "the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Bartholomew's church, in whose vaults slept then, as now, the recovered bones of Aranda." Melville's final stroke of irony asserts the death of the true Christ. In locating the church atop Mount Agonia his focus on the redeemer myth is reaffirmed. The name of this fictitious peak is a Greek epithet meaning "a struggle for victory," and it symbolizes the patron saint of the church who was crucified for stubbornly clinging to his faith in Christ. Conversely, Benito dies a prey to evil, and is buried in the memorial church whose faith he disclaims. Babo's victory over the "blessed" captain is resoundingly proclaimed. The image of the redeemer is dead in the mock host's soul. He has failed to follow his leader.

### III

Blasphemy or satire—either or both—the moral resolution of the story clearly establishes Melville's vision of the contemporary soul: its hollowness, its despair. In Benito and Delano the two streams of religious culture in Western civilization pour into the insatiable wasteland of the spirit. Dying more a spiritual than a physical death, the Spaniard through his fate impugns the vital function of the Catholic Church in human affairs. Dissipated are its powers to direct the moral resources of its followers into selfless, creative endeavors. The martyrdom and the self-sacrifice on which the foundations of the mother church were laid are only whispers of faith and rumors of

dogma. In the decay of its central symbolic rite—the Eucharist—Melville enunciates its failure. Similarly, in Delano's belief that "the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it," the rootlessness of Protestant iconoclasm is directly indicted. Out of touch, ritualistically, with the sources of early Christian faith, the dissenting body of Christians is now in search of a soul. The Emersons of the author's day dramatically affirm this quest. Losing the vision of Christ within, they project it without, externalizing it in nature and the frozen creeds of philosophic verbalism. This tendency to project the ideal outward, in Melville's mind, robs the Christ image of its mysterious relation to inner man. Delano is a typical product of this faith—a posturing, religious automaton without the semblance of spiritual culture. His soul is out of key with his external beliefs. It is constantly denied in thought and act by its possessor. Thus its fate, if less painful than that of Benito's, will be the same. However, in the awareness of inadequacy there is scope for a despair of tragic dimensions; in the veneer of external piety there is scope only for comic hollowness. So Melville damns his civilization—and perhaps himself.

## ELI SIEGEL:

### Also

Sometime, you know, a novel will come  
 From a wooded land, possessing the biting word,  
 The lulling clause; in it lines will be  
 That will cause ringing in the body,  
 Swayings in the eye. It will be a novel which  
 French will have, and French-Asian, Asian-Hani,  
 Asian-Trom. Twigs will be in it for wringing action,  
 Twisting motion. It will be a novel having  
 The graceful, light, much-moving cannon, and, see, too,  
 The delicate, definite, black battery, the dark, all-knowing regiment.  
 This novel will be called The Colonel's Daughter,  
 Or, Rivers Forded Effectively. Glamor, words, branches,  
 Also, this novel has.

## HAZARD ADAMS:

## Yeats the Stylist and Yeats the Irishman

RICHARD ELLMANN: *The Identity of Yeats*. Oxford.

*The Letters of W. B. Yeats* (Allan Wade, editor). Macmillan.

Books on Yeats, and there are a good many of them, have been for the most part biographies or biographical approaches to the poetry. One of the three important biographies is Richard Ellmann's *Yeats, the Man and the Masks*, and now Mr. Ellmann provides what has been for the most part lacking, a general book emphasizing style and symbolism. Even in those books clearly on Yeats's poetry the biography figures in odd ways. In Vivienne Koch's *W. B. Yeats, the Tragic Phase*, for example, Yeats's Steinach operation is emphasized, and in T. R. Henn's *The Lonely Tower* there is considerable recourse to Yeats's life and "philosophy." There is a reason for this preoccupation with Yeats's life, and Mr. Ellmann, in explaining what Yeats's conception of style is, gives it. Yeats conceived of style as "that element in literature which corresponds to the moral element in life. . . . Style was a question of the vigour with which positions were taken and of the honesty with which qualifications were made." We can easily see then why a book which sets out to deal primarily with Yeats's style appears to deal in peripheral matters. When a writer begins to write about Yeats's poetry, he finds himself writing about Yeats. Yeats's own style and his conception of it drive him to do so. Nevertheless, Mr. Ellmann keeps a steady course and does not get lost either in the thicket of Irish politics or the slough of Rosicrucianism. He valiantly battles the Charybdis of gyres and cones and he hacks away at the Scylla which is Yeats's symbolical structure. At times he barely escapes, but if we disagree with what he says we are usually disagreeing with the emphasis he puts on certain points. Mr. Ellmann argues that "Yeats's themes and symbols are fixed in youth, and then renewed with increasing vigour and directness to the end of his life," and he adds that "changes in diction are largely to blind us to the constancy of themes." His view is that Yeats's stylistic changes (syntax and diction) as he substitutes one symbol for another are likely to "conceal their equivalence." For example, he writes, "The sphere is the mature equivalent of the rose. It differs from the rose [Yeats's early symbol] in that Yeats only occasionally mentions it in his verse; that is because it had come to seem a remoter ideal."

One wishes the emphasis were different here. The truth, of course, is that the sphere *is* different from the rose or Yeats would not have made what Mr. Ellmann calls a "substitution"; but even more important, Mr. Ellmann seems momentarily to be abstracting the symbols from the stylistic context in which they appear. The word "mature" may be calculated to get Mr. Ellmann out of this, but I doubt that it is successful. The rose image in Yeats must be taken as part of a somewhat mawkish and plangent poetic projection. In this sense—remoteness from life—the rose is really more remote than the sphere, which is a harder, colder object in what Yeats himself described as a harder, colder

context. Symbols make and are made by their contexts; allegories are imposed upon poems. It is true that in *A Vision* Yeats tells us that "only one symbol" exists; others are merely apparent reflections of the single symbol. But Yeats is a poet of apparent things, and thus the differences between symbols are more important than the similarities. Mr. Ellmann himself tells us that some of the familiar symbols of Yeats's early poetry gradually take on a different aspect in the later poems. Even the early elemental imagery of air, earth, fire, and water seems changed drastically by the later contexts.

To read through Yeats's poems and to observe the symbolism carefully is to remember the unity of Yeats's vision from beginning to end, but also (and this, it seems to me, Mr. Ellmann does not emphasize as much as he might) to become aware of the great variety and uniqueness which his different styles compelled his symbols to enforce. Mr. Ellmann's own observation that Yeats could make Greek mythology—thought by many impossible to use any longer—come alive and work for him really enforces this view of style and symbolism as parts of an infrangible unity. This is a most important observation; and the phenomenon of Yeats's success with Greek myth is made much more meaningful in the light of Mr. Ellmann's discussion of Yeats's style and rhetoric. With many excellent examples, Mr. Ellmann organizes and presents what are obviously the elements of diction and syntax which gave Yeats his particular later voice. He shows that Yeats, though he eschewed the archaic, was really making a new selection of language. Yeats's language is highly formal to the end and sometimes apparently still archaic. Subjunctives are used by beggars, certain kinds of inversions still appear, but the adjective following the noun is gone.

Actually, Yeats achieved greatness of style when he was able to restore the rhetorical and oratorical to poetry without falling into the syntactical and dictional clichés of politicians and certain earlier poets. Some of the "unnaturalness" of Yeats's style comes from his tendency towards compression, the closing of things into a very tight, highly formal language, the act of which tends to remove his poetry from what he would have called—in his own vocabulary—"politics." Mr. Ellmann does not actually make this point about Yeats's compression, though he does argue that immediacy and suddenness are often a result of Yeats's unconventional grammar, but his discussion leads us inevitably to it. He vigorously defends Yeats's stylistic devices by describing their effects. One suspects he oversteps occasionally here. The last line of "To a Poet Who Would Have Me Praise Certain Bad Poets . . ." has always seemed to me an instance of compression gone wrong: "But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?" Nevertheless, Mr. Ellmann's discussion of style manages to say much of importance in a succinct and convincing fashion.

With the qualification already made about separating the consideration of the symbolism from that of the style (leading to an overemphasis upon similarities), I believe that Mr. Ellmann's first chapter is as effective a general introduction to Yeats's art as I have read. He is to be praised also because he has expended only eleven pages in achieving his end. Of course, any such introduction raises all sorts of theoretical problems, which the critic in this day feels he must discuss. In Chapter III, therefore, Mr. Ellmann goes about arguing

that the center of a Yeats poem is not its ideological content. Though such an argument seems almost a cliché of modern criticism, it is more preached than practiced. The value of Mr. Ellmann's discussion in "Assertion Without Doctrine" is the very concise and persuasive manner of his explanation of Yeats's attitude toward the problem of ideology.

Thus far my objections to Mr. Ellmann's book have been against what I conceive to be failure of emphasis. There are one or two more of these, minute as they may seem. Tilting with *A Vision*, as all Yeats commentators must, Mr. Ellmann sometimes takes it as a product of high seriousness, which it is not. *A Vision* has many appearances, running from hoax all the way to philosophy. Before Yeats finishes the book he has apologized for its being each one of these things. Perhaps what we need is a book called *Irish Yeats*.

Mr. Ellmann tells us blithely that Yeats's vortex image has nothing to do with Blake's. This is false. Blake was observing the vortex from a different point of view. He also argues that Yeats's theory of the mask comes from Nietzsche rather than Blake. Though Blake does not use the term "mask," much of Yeats's conception of the mask image clearly comes from Blake's treatment of spectre and emanation, whose conflict is similar to that of Mask and Will and whose sexual intercourse symbolizes apocalypse. The image of sexual apocalypse in Yeats is utterly Blakean and is closely related to the mask image. Here, as in his discussion of the vortex, Mr. Ellmann oversimplifies. But he redeems himself handsomely by suggesting that though Blake's influence is startlingly apparent in particulars, perhaps the main effect of Blake is the "gradually increasing pressure in Yeats's poetry from powerful congeries of symbolic images."

Mr. Ellmann's book contains two most interesting documents, previously unpublished—Yeats's account of a meeting with the young Joyce, and sections of a dialogue called "The Poet and the Actress." He supplies us also with a chronology of the composition of the poems and notes "towards a reading" of various poems. These notes include explanations and significant references to Yeats's prose. Both the chronology and the notes are most useful to any student of the poet.

Mr. Ellmann's book, as do almost all books on Yeats, makes considerable use of Yeats's letters, many of which have not been published in any large collected edition. Now we have *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, published by Macmillan (Rupert Hart-Davis is the British publisher), which appears for a moment to be what it is not—a complete edition of all known Yeats letters. Actually, instead of its being called *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, something like *Selected Letters* would be better. What is missing from it makes a most impressive list: the whole correspondence with Sturge Moore (recently published by Oxford), most of the Dorothy Wellesley correspondence (available, too, in an Oxford edition), the letters to Joyce, Shaw, Pound, Synge, and Mrs. Yeats. Mr. Allan Wade, the editor of the volume, explains why these letters are missing; and we accept his various explanations. Nevertheless, the book masquerades as something it is not.

In spite of the omissions, there is a great deal of most interesting material here, especially the correspondence with Olivia Shakespear, which tells us from



time to time some illuminating things about Yeats's symbolism; letters to John O'Leary, which give us insights into the early Yeats; and letters to Katherine Tynan on a variety of subjects. There are some marvellously amusing anecdotes, and there are indications of the extremely precarious financial situation in which Yeats lived for so long (one somehow doesn't associate Yeats with poverty). Above all, there are indications of a side of Yeats not yet fully explored by anyone: Yeats as an Irishman in the swim of Irish political, literary, and theatrical life. Of Yeats's biographers only Hone really sees Yeats as an Irishman, and Hone mars his work by assuming knowledge of the Irish scene which most American readers simply do not have.

Under Allan Wade's editorship this selection of letters provides us with much information succinctly given in biographical introductions to the various sections and footnotes telling us about the people to whom the letters are addressed and the people who are mentioned. Yeats, of course, provides the rest of the story. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats* is a kind of autobiography, well edited. One only regrets that many people who should have been main characters never appear.

I am not as yet able to understand the principle upon which the index of the book is constructed. In the front of the book is a list of page references to all the letters, arranged in order of recipients. Some of these references appear in the regular index, some do not.

## WALLACE FOWLIE:

### Three Poets

ISABELLA GARDNER: *Birthdays from the Ocean*. Houghton Mifflin.

EDWIN HONIG: *The Moral Circus*. Contemporary Poetry.

BEN BELITT: *Wilderness Stair*. Grove Press.

*Birthdays from the Ocean* is the first volume to be published by Miss Gardner, but all thirty-one poems have already appeared in the literary magazines. Collected together, these poems present a work of significance, of achievement in the art of poetry. Deliberately Isabella Gardner removes from her writing all trace of pathos, but there is feeling, sympathy and even anguish in the verse. Poetry is a revealing to herself of her own world of animals and birds, of flowers and children. She seeks a profound and real contact with things, and through them, a contact with herself. Her knowledge of the world is a sense of exile, of distance, of fear, of small fears that count. The joy she expresses in the pure elements of nature: sun, night, the substance of things, is offset by her disregard for death:

I said to them I am a girl of flesh and bone, my shift's no shroud. •

The outside world speaks to this poet, animates her, solicits her. A blue heron encountered in desert water stops her and her mare, and then causes her to follow after. An action in these poems has the power of releasing the poet, of proving the reality of action and movement to her. This outer action assures the inner tension and the purity of the self.

Such a first volume as this is far more than an offering of promises, of themes related to admired poets, of technical experimentation. It stands quite securely by itself, and reveals, as the pages are turned, an identifiable sensibility and experience. The ancient theme of exile, implicit in the line which serves as title for the entire book, "Birthdays from the Ocean," is perhaps the central focus of most of the poems. The symbols of horse, desert, zoo and museum, of birds found "intolerable" and of "an alien landscape" are too prevalent to escape attention. Isabella Gardner is a poet concentrating her energies and her memories on the frontiers of consciousness because the central object has been willfully obscured or forgotten or has not yet come into view. This is no criticism of the poems as poems, but an effort to understand them in relationship to the poet. They seem often to be celebrations of mysteries carried out in strange foreign places. As the consciousness grows clearer and the apprehension sharper, so does the evidence for the strange and the foreign grow stronger. These poems have reached their form in their depiction of the ever changing forms of the poet's inner life.

Mr. Honig's collection of twenty-five poems, *The Moral Circus*, is volume eight in a distinguished series published by "Contemporary Poetry" in Baltimore. The language of this poet is direct, simple, even colloquial:

The morning shuddered once and stalled

and the thought of the poem is almost always involved and subtle. The second poem, for example, "Hamlet," combines ingredients of literary criticism and psychology. But it is a poem too, as well as "Sleepers," which follows it, and which is an essay on time and seasons and even perhaps on autobiography.

Edwin Honig is inventive and adroit in *The Moral Circus*, which I believe is his second volume of verse. This circus seems to be attended by the poet, alone, on his holiday, when he is continuously solicited, in spite of himself, by literary adventures and by some of the basic problems of humanity. But he remains steadfastly a poet, through "Last Act," appropriately the final poem in the book, and the one which seems to me the most brilliantly and boldly constructed.

These images taken from the circus and the stage, and from meditations on such subjects as "Walt Whitman," establish the variations of the ego, of the "self" with which this poet is concerned. And yet he knows that the individual being is not imaginary, his identity is not an accident. He feels led, implacably so, in his poet's vocation, to postulating the existence of this identity. The poems may appear to be separate metamorphoses, but a principle of unification binds them together, which survives all analyses and all doubts. The lonely circus spectator questions a reality which he knows to be impenetrable. In the silence which often comes in the midst of fanfare, he learns by ideas and words, and constructions of ideas and words.

Ben Belitt is familiar with varied and contrasting landscapes: the granite of a Vermont quarry, the gulf of Mexico, the dunes of Nantucket, a California valley, the tile floor of a Manhattan stairway, cactus gardens and bull-rings in Mexico, the dogwood of Virginia, Battery Park. This writer is entomologist and explorer, but his secret is a poet's. His world is being perpetually renewed, but his poems are inner creations stimulated by the visible scenes. One half of the poems in *Wilderness Stair* are grouped under the title "Departures." The places are recomposed after the departure is over. But it is significant that no matter what the place is, the conflict and the conduct are the same. The being of this poet is immobile and infinite. Colors and particular objects, towns and market squares are, in the last analysis, appearance, accident, deception. The affirmation of the problems, of an ethical and religious nature, grows, despite the poet himself, or despite the poet's sensitivity to color and movement, to fronds and sky.

In the poems of the second half of the book, subdivided into three parts, the religious problem dominates and completes the drama begun in the first half. The "departures" are over, or are seen in another perspective. Saint Augustine's statement, used by Mr. Belitt as epigraph for "Cricket Hill: Vermont," now comes into full force: "Place there is none; we go backward and forward, and there is no place." We observe the game of being and non-being. The poems now unfold against an immobile and absolute background. The conscience of the poet reassembles constraints and fears and suffering. Here, the places become references, commodious references.

I do not believe that Ben Belitt or any other major poet of his generation in America bases his work on the assurance that the poet is invested with anything that might be called a "mission." But nevertheless, in each of the principal poems of *Wilderness Stair*, especially in the second part ("The Habit of Angels") and the third part ("Karamazov"), is present the metaphysical agitation with which today's world is plagued. Periodically poets are questioned as to whether they participate in the problems and the efforts of their time. The poet's reply to this query is his poems. Mr. Belitt's title, *Wilderness Stair*, comes from his poem, "Jacob and His Angel," and refers to Jacob's dream:

Contest, the habit of angels,  
Tempted the man from the wilderness stair.

But the poem itself is concerned with Jacob's struggle with the angel, with man's will to extract his blessing from God. The themes in the other religious poems on Job, Mary, David, and the two poems on Karamazov would lead one to believe that this poet places mankind today in a period of harsh judgment where the cosmic laws and psychological and moral orders are being questioned. These poems are intricately woven representations of sacred symbolism. They provide no ritualistic demonstration, and they offer no trace of edification. Ben Belitt is not a religious poet, in the sense that Claudel is, but he is a religious poet in the tradition of Rimbaud (whom Mr. Belitt admires and has admirably translated).

This poet is a kind of prophet who preserves fragments of images and frag-

ments of visions. No system of metaphysics or theology is apparent in these pages, but they relate a series of moments when God is questioned and when those through whom He has spoken are questioned. Pathos is not absent from these poems. Their beauty depends on a religious state of feeling out of which they grew. The implicit subject of every poem is the poet whom a man cannot conceal from himself. That is, I suppose, why so much of the best modern poetry appears poetry of knowledge, epistemological poetry. The poet thinks the universe; he is consubstantial with it.

CORRECTION: In the review of Edith Sitwell and W. H. Auden by Babette Deutsch, appearing in the Spring 1955 issue, the phrase "the amoral exhaustion of our times" (p. 152, l.7) should read "the moral exhaustion of our times." Also, Miss Deutsch's most recent book is *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, a collection of poems.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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THOMAS B. BRUMBAUGH has recently received his doctorate in art history from Ohio State.

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ELI SIEGEL has been published widely in miscellaneous magazines. He is the author of *The Aesthetic Method in Self-Conflict*.

WILLIAM BYSSHE STEIN, who has a three-year Bollingen Fellowship, is doing a study of Melville's poetic method and a critique of his thematic patterns.

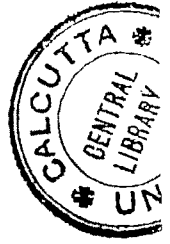
NEIL WEISS, a frequent contributor to *Accent*, will have his first book of poems (*Changes of Garments*) published by Indiana University Press in 1956.

FREDERIC WILL teaches Classics at Dartmouth. His poems have appeared in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*.

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A NOTICE TO OUR READERS: It is well known that Dylan Thomas left behind him many non-commercial or "home" recordings, on wire, tape or disc; now his recording publishers are trying to get hold of such unpublished recordings in order that they may be made available to the general public.

• This seems, in terms of the future, an important project. If you have unpublished recordings by Dylan Thomas, or know of anybody who has, please write Carl Hartman, English Department, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.



# ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

Volume XV, Number 4

Autumn, 1955

## J. F. POWERS:

### Blue Island

On the day the Daviccis moved into their house, Ethel was visited by a "Welcome Wagon" hostess bearing small gifts from local merchants, but after that by nobody for three weeks, only Ralph's relatives and door-to-door salesmen. And then Mrs Hancock came smiling. They sat on the matching green chairs which glinted with threads of what appeared to be gold. In the picture window, the overstimulated plants grew wild in pots.

Mrs Hancock had guessed right about Ethel and Ralph, that they were newlyweds. "Am I right in thinking you're of Swedish descent, Mrs Davicky? You, I mean?"

Ethel smiled, as if taking a compliment, and said nothing.

"I only ask because so many people in the neighborhood are. I'm not, myself," said Mrs Hancock. She was unnaturally pink, with tinted blue hair. Her own sharp-looking teeth were transparent at the tips. "But you're so fair."

"My maiden name was Taylor," Ethel said. It was, and it wasn't—it was the name she'd got at the orphanage. Wanting a cigarette, she pushed the silver box on the coffee table toward Mrs Hancock.

Mrs Hancock used one of her purple claws to pry up the first cigarette from the top layer. "A good old American name like mine."

Like *what*? Ethel wanted to ask. Mrs Hancock wasn't giving her maiden name, though.

"Is your husband in business, Mrs Davicky?"

"Yes, he is." Ethel put the lighter—a simple column of silver, the mate to the box—to Mrs Hancock's cigarette and then to her own.

"Not here in Blue Island?"

"No." From here on, it could be difficult. Ralph was afraid that people in the neighborhood would disapprove of his business. "In Minneapolis." The Mohawk Inn, where Ethel had worked as a waitress, was first-class—thick steaks, dark lights, an electric organ—but Ralph's other places, for which his brothers were listed as the owners, were cut-rate bars on or near Washington Avenue. "He's a distributor," Ethel said, heading her off. "Non-alcoholic beverages mostly." It was true. Ralph had taken over his family's wholesale wine business, never much in Minneapolis, and got it to pay by converting to soft drinks.

Mrs Hancock was noticing the two paintings which, because of their size and the lowness of the ceiling, hung two feet from the floor, but she didn't comment on them. "Lovely, lovely," she said, referring to the driftwood lamp in the picture window. A faraway noise came from her stomach. She raised her voice. "But you've been lonely, haven't you? I could see it when I came in. It's this neighborhood."

"It's very nice," said Ethel quickly. Maybe Mrs Hancock was at war with the neighbors, looking for an ally.

"I suppose you know Mrs Nilgren," said Mrs Hancock, nodding to the left.

"No, but I've seen her. Once she waved."

"She's nice. Tied down with children, though." Mrs Hancock nodded to the right. "How about old Mrs Mann?"

"I don't think anybody's there now."

"The Manns are away! California. So you don't know anybody yet?"

"No."

"I'm surprised you haven't met some of them at the Cashway."

"I never go there," Ethel said. "Ralph—that's my husband—he wants me to trade at the home-owned stores."

"Oh!" Mrs Hancock's stomach cut loose again. "I didn't know people still felt that way." Mrs Hancock looked down the street, in the direction of the little corner store. "Do they do much business?"

"No," said Ethel. The old couple who ran it were suspicious of her, she thought, for buying so much from them. The worst of it was that Ralph had told her to open a charge account, and she

hadn't, and she never knew when he'd stop there and try to use it. There was a sign up in the store that said: In God We Trust—All Others Pay Cash.

"I'll bet that's it," Mrs Hancock was saying. "I'm afraid people are pretty clannish around here—and the Wagners have so many friends. They live one-two-three-five houses down." Mrs Hancock had been counting the houses across the street. "Mr Wagner's the manager of the Cashway."

Ethel was holding her breath.

"I'm afraid so," said Mrs Hancock.

Ethel sighed. It was Ralph's fault. She'd always wanted to trade at the Cashway.

Mrs Hancock threw back her head, inhaling, and her eyelids, like a doll's, came down. "I'm afraid it's your move, Mrs Davicky."

Ethel didn't feel that it was her move at all and must have shown it.

Mrs Hancock sounded impatient. "Invite 'em in. Have 'em in for a morning coffee."

"I couldn't do that," Ethel said. "I've never been to one." She'd only read about coffees in the women's magazines to which Ralph subscribed her. "I wouldn't know how."

"Nothing to it. Rolls, coffee, and come as you are. Of course nobody really does, not really." Mrs Hancock's stomach began again. "Oh, shut up," she said to it. "I've just come from one too many." Mrs Hancock made a face, showing Ethel a brown mohair tongue. She laughed at Ethel. "Cheer up. It wasn't in this neighborhood."

Ethel felt better. "I'll certainly think about it," she said.

Mrs Hancock rose, smiling, and went over to the telephone. "You'll do it right now," she said, as though being an older woman entitled her to talk that way to Ethel. "They're probably dying to get inside this lovely house."

After a moment, Ethel, who was already on her feet, having thought that Mrs Hancock was leaving, went over and sat down to telephone. In the wall mirror she saw how she must appear to Mrs Hancock. When the doorbell had rung, she'd been in too much of a hurry to see who it was to do anything about her lips and hair. "Will they know who I am?"

"Of course." Mrs Hancock squatted on the white leather hassock with the phone book. "And you don't have to say I'm coming. Oh, I'll come. I'll be more than happy to. You don't need me, though. All you need is confidence."

And Mrs Hancock was right. Ethel called eight neighbors, and six could come on Wednesday morning, which Mrs Hancock had thought would be the best time for her. Two of the six even sounded anxious to meet Ethel, and, surprisingly, Mrs Wagner was one of these.

"You did it all yourself," said Mrs Hancock.

"With your help," said Ethel, feeling indebted to Mrs Hancock, intimately so. It was if they'd cleaned the house together.

They were saying goodbye on the front stoop when Ralph rolled into the driveway. Ordinarily at noon he parked just outside the garage, but that day he drove in—without acknowledging them in any way. "Mr Daveechee," Ethel commented. For Mrs Hancock, after listening to Ethel pronounce her name for all the neighbors, was still saying "Davicky."

Mrs Hancock stayed long enough to get the idea that Ralph wasn't going to show himself. She went down the front walk saying, "Bye now."

While Mrs Hancock was getting into her car, which seemed a little old for the neighborhood, Ralph came out of the garage.

Mrs Hancock waved and nodded—which, Ethel guessed, was for Ralph's benefit, the best Mrs Hancock could do to introduce herself at the distance. She drove off. Too late, Ralph's hand moved up to wave. He stared after Mrs Hancock's moving car with a look that just didn't belong to him, Ethel thought, a look that she hadn't seen on his face until they moved out to Blue Island.

During lunch, Ethel tried to reproduce her conversation with Mrs Hancock, but she couldn't tell Ralph enough. He wanted to know the neighbors' names, and she could recall the names of only three. Mrs Wagner, one of them, was very popular in the neighborhood, and her husband . . . "You go to the Cashway then. Some of 'em sounded all right, huh?" "Ralph, they all sounded all right, real friendly. The man next door sells insurance. Mr Nilgren."

Ethel remembered that one of the husbands was a lawyer and told Ralph that. He left the table. A few minutes later, Ethel heard him driving away.

It had been a mistake to mention the lawyer to Ralph. It had made him think of the shooting they'd had at the Bow Wow, one of the joints. There had been a mixup, and Ralph's home address had appeared in the back pages of one of the papers when the shooting was no longer news. Ethel doubted that the neighbors had seen the little item. Ralph might be right about the lawyer, though, who



would probably have to keep up with everything like that.

Ralph wouldn't have worried so much about such a little thing in the old days. He was different now. It was hard to get him to smile. Ethel could remember how he would damn the Swedes for slapping higher and higher taxes on liquor and tobacco, but now, when she pointed out a letter some joker had written to the paper suggesting a tax on coffee, or when she showed him the picture of the wife of the Minnesota senator—the fearless one—christening an ore boat with a bottle of milk, which certainly should've given Ralph a laugh, he was silent.

It just made Ethel sick to see him at the windows, watching Mr Nilgren, a sandy-haired, dim-looking man who wore plaid shirts and a red cap in the yard. Mr Nilgren would be raking out his hedge, or wiring up the skinny little trees, or washing his car if it was Sunday morning, and there Ralph would be, behind a drape. One warm day Ethel had seen Mr Nilgren in the yard with a golf club, and had said, "He should get some of those little balls that don't go anywhere." It had been painful to see Ralph then. She could almost *hear* him thinking. He would get some of those balls and give them to Mr Nilgren as a present. No, it would look funny if he did. Then he got that sick look that seemed to come from wanting to do a favor for someone who might not let him do it.

A couple of days later Ethel learned that Ralph had gone to an indoor driving range to take golf lessons. He came home happy, with a club he was supposed to swing in his spare time. He'd made a friend too, another beginner. They were going to have the same schedule and be measured for clubs. During his second lesson, however, he quit. Ethel wasn't surprised, for Ralph, though strong, was awkward. She was better than he was with a hammer and nails, and he mutilated the heads of screws. He must have been badly surprised to discover he was just as bad when he went back the second time, after carrying the club around the house for three days. Ethel asked about the other beginner, and at first Ralph acted as though she'd made him up, and then he hotly rejected the word "friend," which she'd used. Finally he said, "If you ask me, that bastard's played before!"

That was just like him. At the coffee, Ethel planned to ask the women to come over soon with their husbands, but she was afraid some of the husbands wouldn't take to Ralph. Probably he could buy insurance from Mr Nilgren. He would want to do something for the ones who weren't selling something, though—if there were any like

that—and they might misunderstand Ralph. He was used to buying the drinks. He should relax and take the neighbors as they came. Or move.

She didn't know why they were there anyway. It was funny. After they were married, before they left on their honeymoon, Ralph had driven her out to Blue Island and walked her through the house. That was all there was to it. Sometimes she wondered if he'd won the house at cards. She didn't know why they were there when they could just as well be living at Minnetonka or White Bear where they could keep a launch like the one they'd hired in Florida—and where the houses were far apart and neighbors wouldn't matter so much. What were they waiting for? Some of the things they owned, she knew, were for later. They didn't need sterling for eighteen in Blue Island. And the two big pictures were definitely for later.

She didn't know what Ralph liked about his picture, which was of an Indian who looked all-in sitting on a horse that looked all-in, but he had gone to the trouble of ordering it from a regular art store. Hers was more cheerful, the palace of the Doge of Venice, Italy. Ralph hadn't wanted her to have it at first. He was really down on anything foreign. (There were never any Italian dishes on the menu at the Mohawk.) But she believed he liked her for wanting that picture, for having a weakness for things Italian, for him—and even for his father and mother whom he was always sorry to see and hadn't invited to the house. When they came anyway, with his brothers, their wives and children (and wine, which Ralph wouldn't touch), Ralph was in and out, upstairs and down, never long in the same room with them, never encouraging them to stay when they started to leave. They called him "Rock" or "Rocky," but Ralph didn't always answer to that. To one of the little boys who had followed him down into the basement, Ethel had heard him growl, "The name's Ralph"—that to a nine-year-old. His family must have noticed the change in Ralph, but they were wrong if they blamed her, just because she was a little young for him, a blonde and not a Catholic—not that Ralph went to church. In fact, she thought Ralph would be better off with his family for his friends, instead of counting so much on the neighbors. She liked Ralph's family and enjoyed having them in the house.

And if Ralph's family hadn't come around, the neighbors might even think they weren't properly married, that they had a love nest going there. Ethel didn't blame the neighbors for being suspicious of her and Ralph. Mr Nilgren in his shirt and cap that did nothing

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for him, he belonged there, but not Ralph, so dark, with his dark blue suits, pearl grey hats, white jacquard shirts—and with her, with her looks and platinum hair. She tried to dress down, to look like an older woman, when she went out. The biggest thing in their favor, but it wasn't noticeable yet, was the fact that she was pregnant.

Sometimes she thought Ralph must be worrying about the baby—as she was—about the kind of life a little kid would have in a neighborhood where his father and mother didn't know anybody. There were two pre-school children at the Nilgrens'. Would they play with the Davicci kid? Ethel didn't ever want to see that sick look of Ralph's on a child of hers.

That afternoon two men in white overalls arrived from Minneapolis in a white truck and washed the windows, inside and out, including the basement and garage. Ralph had sent them. Ethel sat in the dining room and polished silver to the music of *Carmen* on records. She played whole operas when Ralph wasn't home.

In bed that night Ralph made her run through the neighbors again. Seven for sure, counting Mrs Hancock. "Is that all?" Ethel said she was going to call the neighbor who hadn't been home. "When?" When she got the number from Mrs Hancock. "When's that?" When Mrs Hancock phoned, if she phoned . . . and that was where Ralph believed Ethel had really fallen down. She didn't have Mrs Hancock's number—or address—and there wasn't a Hancock listed for Blue Island in the phone book. "How about next door?" Mrs Nilgren was still coming. "The other side?" The Manns were still away, in California, and Ralph knew it. "They might come back. Ever think of that? You don't wanna leave them out." *Them*, he'd said, showing Ethel what was expected of her. He wanted those husbands. Ethel promised to watch for the return of the Manns. "They could come home in the night." Ethel reminded Ralph that a person in her condition needed a lot of sleep, and Ralph left her alone then.

Before Ralph was up the next morning, Ethel started to clean the house. Ralph was afraid the house-cleaning wouldn't be done right (*he* spoke of her condition) and wanted to get another crew of professionals out from Minneapolis. Ethel said it wouldn't look good. She said the neighbors expected them to do their own house-cleaning—and *window washing*. Ralph shut up.

When he came home for lunch, Ethel was able to say that Mrs Hancock had called and that the neighbor who hadn't been home

could come to the coffee. Ethel had talked to her, and she had sounded very friendly. "That's three of 'em, huh?" Ethel was tired of that one, but told him they'd *all* sounded friendly to her. "Mrs Hancock okay?" Mrs Hancock was okay. More than happy to be coming. Ralph asked if Ethel had got Mrs Hancock's phone number and address. No. "Why not?" Mrs Hancock would be there in the morning. That was why—and Ralph should get a hold on himself.

In the afternoon, after he was gone, Ethel put on one of her new conservative dresses and took the bus to Minneapolis to buy some Swedish pastry. She wanted something better than she could buy in Blue Island. In the window of the store where they'd bought Ralph's Indian, there were some little miniatures, lovely New England snow scenes. She hesitated to go in when she saw the sissy clerk was on duty again. He had made Ralph sore, asking how he'd like to have the Indian framed in birch bark. The Mohawk was plastered with birch bark, and Ralph thought the sissy recognized him and was trying to be funny. "This is going into my home!" Ralph had said and ordered the gold frame costing six times as much as the Indian. However, he'd taken the sissy's advice about having a light put on it. Ethel hesitated, but she went in. In his way, the sissy was very nice, and Ethel went home with five little Old English prints. When she'd asked about the pictures in the window, the New England ones, calling them "landscapes," he'd said "snowscapes" and looked disgusted, as if they weren't what she should want.

When she got home, she hung the prints over the sofa where there was a blank space, and they looked fine in their shiny black frames. She didn't say anything to Ralph, hoping he'd notice them, but he didn't until after supper. "Hey, what is this?" he said. He bounced off the sofa, confronting her. "Ralph, they're cute!" "Not in my home!" "Ralph, they're humorous!" The clerk had called them that. But Ralph called them drunks and whores. He had Ethel feeling ashamed of herself. It was hard to believe that she could have felt they were just fat and funny and just what their living room needed, as the clerk had said. Ralph took them down. "Man or woman sell 'em to you?" Ethel, seeing what he had in mind, knew she couldn't tell him where she'd got them. She lied. "I was in Dayton's . . ." "A woman—all right, then you take 'em back!"

She was scared. Something like that was enough to make Ralph regret *marrying* her—and to remind her again that she couldn't have made him. If there had been a showdown between them, he would've learned about her first pregnancy. It would've been easy for a lawyer

to find out about that. She'd listened to an old doctor who'd told her to go ahead and have it, that she'd love her little baby, who hadn't lived, but there would be a record anyway. She wasn't sorry about going to a regular hospital to have it, though it made it harder for her now, having that record. She'd done what she could for the baby. She hated to think of the whole thing, but when she did, as she did that evening, she knew she'd done her best.

It might have been a bad evening for her, with Ralph brooding on her faults, if a boy hadn't come to the door selling chances on a raffle. Ralph bought all the boy had, over five dollars' worth, and asked where he lived in the neighborhood. "I live in Minneapolis." "Huh? Whatcha doin' way out here then?" The boy said it was easier to sell chances out there. Ethel, who had been doing the dishes, returned to the sink before Ralph could see her. He went back to his *Reader's Digest*, and she slipped off to bed, early, hoping his mind would be occupied with the boy if she kept out of sight.

He came to bed after the ten o'clock news. "You awake?" Ethel, awake, but afraid he wanted to talk neighbors, moaned remotely. "If anybody comes to the door sellin' anything, make sure it's somebody local."

In the morning, Ralph checked over the silver and china laid out in the dining room and worried over the pastry. "Fresh?" Fresh! She'd put it in the deep freeze right away and it hadn't even thawed out yet. "Is *that* all?" That was all, and it was more than enough. She certainly didn't need a whole quart of whipping cream. "Want me to call up for something to go with this?" No. "Turkey or a ham? I maybe got time to go myself if I go right now." He carried on like that until ten o'clock, when she got rid of him, saying, "You wouldn't want to be the only man, Ralph."

Then she was on her own, wishing Mrs Hancock would come early and see her through the first minutes.

But Mrs Wagner was the first to arrive. After that, the neighbors seemed to ring the bell at regular intervals. Ethel met them at the door, hung their coats in the hall closet, returning each time to Mrs Wagner in the kitchen. They were all very nice, but Mrs Wagner was the nicest.

"Now let's just let everything be," she said after they'd arranged the food in the dining room. "Let's go in and meet your friends."

They found the neighbors standing before the two pictures. Ethel snapped on the spot lights. She heard little cries of pleasure all around.

"Heirlooms!"

"Is Mr Davitchy a collector?"

"Just likes good things, huh?"

"I just love this lamp."

"I just *stare* at it when I go by."

"So do I."

Ethel, looking at her driftwood lamp, her plants, and beyond, stood in a haze of pleasure. Earlier, when she was giving her attention to Mrs Nilgren (who was telling about the trouble "Carl" had with his trees), Ethel had seen Ralph's car cruise by, she thought, and now again, but this time there was no doubt of it. She recognized the rather old one parked in front as Mrs Hancock's, but where was Mrs Hancock?

"Hello, everybody!"

Mrs Hancock had let herself in, and was hanging up her coat.

Ethel disappeared into the kitchen. She carried the coffee pot, which had been on *low*, into the dining room where they were supposed to come and help themselves. She stood by the pot, nervous, ready to pour, hoping that someone would look in and see that she was ready, but no one did.

She went to see what they were doing. They were still sitting down, listening to Mrs Hancock. She'd had trouble with her car. That was why she was late. She saw Ethel. "I can see you want to get started," she said, rising. "So do I."

Ethel returned to the dining room and stood by the coffee pot.

Mrs Hancock came first. "Starved," she said. She carried off her coffee, roll, and two of the little Swedish cookies, and Ethel heard her in the living room rallying the others.

They came then, quietly, and Ethel poured. When all had been served, she started another pot of coffee, and took her cup and a cookie—she wasn't hungry—into the living room.

Mrs Hancock, sitting on the hassock, had a bottle in her hand. On the rug around her were some brushes and one copper pan. "Ladies," she was saying, "now here's something new." Noticing Ethel, Mrs Hancock picked up the pan. "How'd you like to have this for your kitchen? Here."

Ethel crossed the room. She carried the pan back to where she'd been standing.

"This is no ordinary polish," continued Mrs Hancock, shaking the bottle vigorously. "This is what is known as liquefied ointment. It possesses rare medicinal properties. It renews wood. It gives you

a base for polishing—something to shine that simply wasn't there before. There's nothing like it on the market—not in the polish field. It's a Shipshape product, and you all know what that means." Mrs Hancock opened the bottle and dabbed at the air. "Note the handy applicator." Snatching a cloth from her lap, she rubbed the leg of the coffee table—"remove all foreign matter first"—and dabbed at the leg with the applicator. "This does for wood what liniment does for horses. It relaxes the grain, injects new life, *soothes* the wood. Well, how do you like it?" she called over to Ethel.

Ethel glanced down at the pan, forgotten in her hand.

"Pass it around," said Mrs Hancock.

Ethel offered the pan to Mrs Nilgren, who was nearest.

"I've seen it, thanks."

Ethel moved to the next neighbor.

"I've seen it."

Ethel moved on. "Mrs Wagner, have you?"

"Many times"—with a smile.

Ethel looked back where she'd been standing before she started out with the pan—and went the other way, finally stepping into the hallway. There she saw a canvas duffle bag on the side of which was embossed a pennant flying the word SHIPSHAPE. And hearing Mrs Hancock—"And this is new, girls. Can you all see from where you're sitting?"—Ethel began to move again. She kept right on going.

Upstairs, in the bedroom, lying down, she noticed the pan in her hand. She shook it off. It hit the headboard of the bed, denting the traditional mahogany, and came to rest in the satin furrow between Ralph's pillow and hers. Oh, God! In a minute, she'd have to get up and go down to them and do *something* . . . but then she heard the coat hangers banging back empty in the closet downstairs, and the front door opening and, finally, closing. There was a moment of perfect silence in the house before her sudden sob, then another moment, before she heard someone coming, climbing the carpeted stairs.

Ethel foolishly thought it would be Mrs Wagner, but of course it was Mrs Hancock, after her pan.

She tiptoed into the room, adjusted the venetian blind, and seated herself lightly on the edge of the bed. "Don't think I don't know how you feel," she said. "Not that it shows yet. I wasn't *sure*, dear." She looked into Ethel's eyes, frightening her.

As though only changing positions, Ethel moved the hand that Mrs Hancock was after.

"My ointment would fix that, restore the surface," said Mrs Hancock, her finger searching the little wound in the headboard. She began to explain, gently—like someone with a terrible temper warming up: "When we first started having these little Shipshape parties, they didn't tell each other. They do now, oh yes, or they would if I'd let them. I'm onto them. They're just in it for the mops now. You get one, you know, for having the party in your home. It's collapsible, ideal for the small home or travel. But the truth is you let me down! Why, when you left the room the way you did, you didn't give them any choice. Why, I don't think there's one of that crowd—with the exception of May Wagner—that isn't using one of my free mops! Why, they just walked out on me!"

Ethel, closing her eyes, saw Mrs Hancock alone, on the hassock, with her products all around her.

"It's a lot of pan for the money," Mrs Hancock was saying now. She reached over Ethel's body for it. "You'll love your little pan," she said, fondling it.

Ethel's eyes were resisting Mrs Hancock, but her right hand betrayed her.

"Here?" Mrs Hancock opened a drawer, took out a purse, and handed it over, saying, "Only \$12.95."

Ethel found a five and a ten.

"You *do* want the ointment, don't you? The pan and the large bottle come to a little more than this, but it's not enough to worry about."

Mrs Hancock got up, apparently to leave.

Ethel thought of something. "You do live in Blue Island, don't you?" Ralph would be sure to ask about that—if she had to tell him. And she would!

"Not any more, thank God."

Ethel nodded. She wasn't surprised.

Mrs Hancock, at the door, peeked out—reminding Ethel of a bored visitor looking for a nurse who would tell her it was time to leave the patient. "I'll leave your ointment and mop downstairs," she said. "I just know everything's going to be all right." Then she smiled and left.

When, toward noon, Ethel heard Ralph come into the driveway, she got out of bed, straightened the spread, and concealed the pan in the closet. She went to the window and gazed down upon the crown of his pearl grey hat. He was carrying a big club of roses.



# YVAN GOLL:

## Landless John Circles the Earth Seven Times

Translated by William Carlos Williams

At blond dawn  
A life unfurled  
He journeys far  
To the great world

He departs alone  
The mystery soldier  
A simple flower  
In his button-hole

Smiling always  
Blinking clear  
He deceives love  
At each frontier

In the cities  
Boiling with beer  
All gaiety  
Loses its cheer

At the port bars  
Watched for his grace  
The strong boys  
Hate his face

Beloved by the seas  
And fever isles  
Bitter winds  
Kiss him whiles

Seven times  
He circles the earth  
Bearing his faith  
In his head's girth

Barber bootblack  
 Priest corsair  
 Emperor bankrupt  
 Wastrel's fair

It's small matter  
 The world to course  
 To eat fire  
 To make wars

Oh the same trouble  
 Everywhere  
 Coming and going  
 Walk and stair

Morning and night  
 Bread and thirst  
 Flesh and dream  
 Here! Eat and burst!

Individual  
 Sad heart and bare  
 Wordless and nameless  
 His own despair

No papers left  
 No heirs found  
 Beg for your death  
 At the burying-ground

## Landless John Leads the Caravan

Translated by William Carlos Williams

Have I a hundred years since or  
 A hundred thousand tramped these wastes  
 With a track more vulnerable  
 Than fire of a sun that hastes?

My camel leads the caravan  
 Through centuries of rusted sand

To find as might any profane wind  
The key to the oblivion land

My great-grandparents long since  
Have worked this sea and no less  
Could their passing shadow have brought  
To yoke the ancient nothingness

Although life's mortal light  
Would wring their hearts about by day  
Still they had a candle lit  
For antique love to find the way

In me their ancient skeleton  
Of God calcined by the years  
And my new flesh tries as it may  
To fill it with heavy cares

I hear the red wolf that howls  
On the cavern of my blood  
Cracking the bones at nightfall  
Of the dream again abroad

Sail on sail on slow dromedaries  
And traverse eternity  
From the quaternary dawns  
To the tomb's near certainty

My kin with limbs of gold and ebony  
Die of thirst and of hope the most  
At both my wrists I open the veins  
That may prove to them a host

O wish that my love would rot  
And never see light again  
If by this final sacrifice  
A young god be born in men

If without Alp to water  
From the desert's lifeless skin  
The freshness of a rose should rise  
And a cloak of sudden green

No bitch will I need to chase  
 The hunger of a jackal  
 Enough that my faith revive  
 And the aurora of my choral

Offering those who covet  
 Slow camel and proud lion  
 Salt from my weak moist hand  
 The strength of my religion

## John Death

Translated by William Jay Smith

I run to the plains  
 That are loud with streams  
 Where fountains climbing  
 Tell their dreams

I enter the dark  
 And quiet glade  
 Of the tribes of the dead  
 The peoples of shade

There under the ivy  
 The bare veined stone  
 My youthful father  
 Keeps watch alone

Beneath the delirium  
 Of glow-worms' light  
 His patient smile  
 Braves endless night

The whole universe  
 In him resounds  
 Autumnal voices  
 And winter sounds

By a howling storm  
 Are the heavens torn?

Or is it the blare  
Of Gabriel's horn?

Of a sudden the brown  
Night deepens to gray  
The full moon reddens  
And rots away

Biblical tomb  
Will you open for me  
To the probing bomb  
Of memory?

Beneath a black star's  
Total eclipse  
Do I hear a descending  
Apocalypse?

The alders dance  
Distinct and clear  
Already their trance  
Awakens my fear

Church steeples nearby  
With heads of tin  
Nod bunches of bells  
Like mannikins

Sorcerer owls  
Their eyes open wide  
From the willows watch  
On every side

"Father!" I cry  
In my mad monotone  
While an owl coughs  
On its perch of stone

Then among brambles  
John Dying John Death  
My feeble body  
Sinks to the earth

# RADCLIFFE SQUIRES:

## Self Land

The distant knowledge of myself is a land whose unreality  
Has become less real with roads and beehives and  
Alfalfa fields, stretched tenderly and cautiously  
In summer storms. But fields, hives, roads come to an end  
At a high lake, like footprints that turn into the sea.

I mean, suddenly there is no road, and you're aware  
The element is new. You need claws or wings or gills  
To tide you over catastrophic shifts, for here  
This lake refuses color from the sky but takes the cruel  
Glance of granite peaks afloat like icebergs in the air.

I think when I see this that I turn back, do not go  
Beyond the road, across the lake and up those leaden  
Scarps where motion seems asleep. Simply, this is not so.  
In the bonfire that is ever melting the snow maiden  
I am ascending, growing diadems of frost, turning into snow.

## Extinct Lions

Where lions are extinct you will see some afternoon—  
Some lion's afternoon, that is—the golden web  
Of the lion's face smiling at you from an ordinary lane.  
You will watch him stretch the lazy fluting of his ribs  
And soar into a wall of leaves. You may not see him again.

Is it true that the lion stood like an ember in your eyes?  
Or that years ago the last lion died toothless in his lair  
Beyond back valleys where his skeleton still lies  
Half clasped in loam, half clasping loam in the bare  
And loveless bones? You ask this, yet would you tease

The savage body forth unless with a severed will  
• You were thinking of the time you will break through the wall

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# VERNON YOUNG:

## Fugue of Faces:

### A Danish Film and Some Photographs

Those of us for whom the written word is after all the sustaining expression to which we turn for statements of the imaginative and intellectual life must deplore the contemporary abandonment of reading in favor of those short cuts to culture which are actually endless detours: the picture magazine (see, look and live!), television and the movie. For a film critic, this is an especially troublesome acknowledgement, since his function is precisely to discover and relate in motion picture art those concerns which are basic to all the expressive arts. If he is honest, he will admit that instances of a film, in its own aesthetic terms, supplying the spectator with an experience equal in serious definition and in style to the arts with which it is contemporary, are distressingly rare. Carl-Theodore Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, a silent movie (this, one hour after you've watched it, seems hard to believe), is one of those instances; it forces our consent to the proposition that *to see* is as fruitful as *to know*, when the object of our seeing has been invested with the form that inspires knowledge. Knowledge, of the poetic order, let us say.

Ideally the cinema, like painting in this respect, is not a substitute for verbal revelation. It is an art with its own responsibilities and its own means for extracting, as in the Dreyer film, the sum of tragedy from a unified visual experience. It is in the highest sense an illiterate art. The least impressive films are often those that affect literacy. These may entertain; they may flatter the pretensions of the word-snob; they accomplish nothing: nothing that the theater can't accomplish. They attract the eye without opening it and if they are "sound" films they assail the ear without attuning it. The pure film constitutes a world of feeling before which, as audience, our senses are sharpened and our minds stimulated as they would be in scrutinizing great plastic art or in apprehending the ideas of a critic or novelist. The relative immediacy of even an exceptional motion picture is deceptive. Easy enough, in many cases, to follow the visual story line, but extraordinarily difficult for most people to



recognize the selective and complex means by which a sequence of photographs, moving forward in time as variously as water or as music, has become the instrument of a moral imagination. *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, made by a Dane with French actors in 1928, narrated almost entirely in closeup, vindicates the cinematic ideal.

Not the least remarkable feature of this film is the daring curve that Dreyer took—backward, so to speak—in the direction of the manipulated still, and away from the more eclectic methods of the greatest among his contemporaries, such as Epstein, Murnau, Ruttman and Eisenstein (though one does wonder whether his sharpest point of departure mightn't have been conceived after studying the mesmerizing Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*). Especially during the first long inquisition passage, his method is deliberately *successive*, rather than fluid or percussive. In the process of fashioning a film which to this day has few equals in uniqueness of conception (or in depth of feeling), Dreyer risked sacrificing the quintessence of cinema: interfluent motion. He took the risk and made a masterwork, incomparable and inimitable: a play (in the fugal sense) of photos—a *photoplay* (What a pity the term has been otherwise appropriated!). And the austerity of its means is the controlling factor of its greatness. Cutting from closeup to closeup was already, in 1928, one of the accepted ellipses of dramatic continuity in films, but it had simply never occurred to anyone to try sustaining the device, with but few variations, for the full length of a movie!

Dreyer opened his film *in medias res*. No preliminaries; no exposition of where and when (We all know about Joan of Domremy-la-Pucelle)! A hand thumbs a legal volume, closeup, and we are thereupon moved abruptly into the court-room (Into a court-room! Medieval, perhaps; the furnishings roughly denote the period, but the clothing of Joan's inquisitors is timelessly ecclesiastic, and the British soldiers wear World-War-I helmets with chin-straps!). A stool is contemptuously set down for the prisoner who from here on is the almost unrelentingly focalized object of the camera. We are placed *in* Joan's world, which consists of little else but facial reflections of her inner conviction assailed by the faces of her enemy—*men*. Importunate men: leering, skeptical, fanatical, stupid—or pitying, from a complacent distance. Under Dreyer's supervision, Rudolf Maté bears down with the camera as if he were going to devour the actors with it, stressing the mystic's unbridgeable isolation and magnifying, to the point of grossness, the fidgeting mortality of her prosecutors. An inquisitor picks his nose, scratches the bald top of

his head, or pulls at a tuft of his sweating tonsure. A monk, fuming and obscene, vituperates the prisoner in a visible shower of spittle . . . A fly settles on Joan's face . . . The "trial" becomes a fugue of faces—beleagured Maid and predisposed tribunal—subject and counter-subject circumscribed within a visual polyphony, unabating and nobly monotonous. Yet there is development, crescendo, statement and restatement. For rhythmic variety, Dreyer employed both the cut and the laterally-moving camera (i.e., *panning*), and his closeups are fabulously varied—taken full-face, profile, slantwise, overhead, from below and from the back. Sometimes a head occupies the whole frame, sometimes one side or a corner only.

As the film advances to its terrible climax—by way of the torture-chamber and preparations in the market-place for the burning of Joan—the action grows more inclusive, and the cutting-rate is faster. The world *is* larger than a courtroom or a dungeon—but not much larger—ringed by walls, guards, moats, stern towers and the machinery of execution. But there *are* people in it besides inquisitors; ordinary people, curious, frightened, obdurate, wanting (perhaps) to understand, to sympathize, to feel, above all to believe. The sky is like a steel helmet, yet there is room in it for birds to fly, unimpeded, from the prison to the church. The gravedigger shovels up a skull. A flower blooms. In the crowd a baby feeds at the breast, gulping on plenitude, then turns to stare at the doomed woman with neuter eyes that offer no solace from the comfortable world of its innocence. The birds fly over, unrestricted by chains or by self-imposed fictions of the spirit which are none the less all Joan knows of truth. The impossible doubt invades her. If *no one* shares her conviction, could she not be mistaken? She has but to declare that there were no visions, no visitations, that there can be nothing beyond the touch, the smell, the look, the accustomed relationship of substances in space . . . She recants, eager to repossess the natural world. But this alternative is denied her; instead she is condemned to imprisonment and returned to her cell where her already manwise hair is shaved off to the bone. The people celebrate with a carnival. One man shouts "Long live Joan!" and he is pitched into the moat. In the dungeon the sight of her shorn locks swept up like wood-shavings is the final affront that restores Joan to the sanity of her insanity. Her expression plainly tells that if she has traversed so far the road of the denatured she must go all the way. In revulsion and exaltation she reaffirms her visions, and the faces swing again like pendulums . . . They rush her to her death.

Once more the daylight and the sky—and a freer-ranging camera. Life at the decisive moment is more than a pinpoint of solitude and persecution. It includes protest from anonymous faces in the crowd, combat, defense, and suppression with iron knouts. And a pile of faggots. The birds take their flight . . . For refusing to say "Yes," one human being—a great fool? a divine? a mortal sick unto hallucination?—is to be roasted alive in a small cramped space of the monstrous earth by a corps of armored bullies who are breaking like straws the bones of the pitiful few who would deliver her. (Where else have we seen this spearhead of time on a shield of space? Isn't it in Brueghel's "Massacre of the Innocents"—the tight phalanx of power, the frantic cluster of villagers on a frozen earth with no conceivable hope of rescue under a steel-plated sky?) Joan does not cry out but her head falls forward. Obscured by smoke she is no longer a face, a profile, a closeup, a note sounding. She is a silhouette, a shadow of Man. Now she no longer has even the sensation of being alone.

The remnants of the resisting crowd are pushed back and struck down, as the soldiers retreat over the drawbridge to the tower. The bridge is raised. The people kneel on the far side, lamenting . . . The fugue is resolved.

*The Passion of Joan of Arc* is one film among probably less than a dozen of which it can be said that it adds deeply to the sum of one's experience. It exposes the nerve-root of a spiritual denouement which Bernard Shaw's play, *St. Joan*, for all its complex of ecclesiastical and political forces, never glimpsed. The historical ramifications that contributed to the prestige of Shaw's drama were precisely what Dreyer put aside; in so doing he met his subject literally face to face. Strangely, it has bothered not a few critics (I believe Iris Barry was the first in this line of disparagement) that Dreyer's Joan is not *in* history, that she is a beleaguered face merely, without social attachments or precedent dimension. Such paltry objections to Dreyer's artistic ruthlessness should be dismissed with a high hand. As a matter for the record it might be pointed out that details of the trial itself were researched from original documents, and it is difficult to imagine how a crisis in the remote past could be recreated more concretely or with a more austere selection of data than this one. But personality is beyond the reach of documents. We don't (or shouldn't) give a hang whether this *is* the Joan of history (whoever that may be). Maria Falconetti impersonated her as one distinctly "possessed."

Further than this we may construe as we please. The absolute social context is irreclaimable. Jeanne D'Arc does not historically exist—no more than Jesus or Cleopatra or Napoleon or, very soon, Gandhi. She belongs to imagination, not history; she is a figment. In Carl Dreyer's movie she is simply a subject born of metaphysical drives and temperamental probabilities . . . It is always too late to know *the truth*; it is forever possible to experience that truth which it is the overbearing privilege of art to enact for us.

By a coincidence providential for the delight of *The Comparative Eye*, Dreyer's curious and superlative film was revived at the Museum of Modern Art simultaneously with the opening of Edward Steichen's photographic exhibit, "The Family of Man" (now on world tour and reproduced in book form). In this compelling association, the reciprocal values of still and cinema photography were given prominence and vitally enhanced, the more so as the two media seemed bent on exchanging identities: the photographs all but conveying motion, the film so concentrated on a single cinematic element as to appear relatively static. On one hand, an aggregate of separate moments coerced into vivid succession; on the other a succession crystallized into an anguished moment.

Insofar as the photographs had for their theme, *Man in Crisis*—and this was the overall effect they gave, even though predications less critical were on view—their impact was a consequence of drama suspended, of a challenge to one's inferences and one's curiosity . . . A mud-spattered war infant, scarcely beyond the age of toddle, awaiting, with no visible concern, sequels unpredictable to his insensate misery. (Where? Anywhere!) . . . A small neat boy going tranquilly down steps to school in a city of rubble . . . A girl tied to a tree, caught in a twist of fear that she may be the victim in a game that has gone too far . . . A pair of lovers embracing goodbye on a railway platform, cornered by the inexorable (and Ernst Haas) in a composition any cinematographer would applaud . . . Youth: on the make, on the prowl, on the beach—on the run . . . Old men on farms with hopeless eyes. Old (before their time) rural women with calculating eyes . . . The tracteries of time and of something more than time in the faces of the late Werner Bischof's Indian women ("Do these bones live?") . . . Cartier-Bresson's four sibylline figures invoking Brahma . . . And one of the most powerful emblems of human protest ever captured by a roving camera: Anna Riwkin-Brick's Israelite Cassandra,

with accusing arm raised high, fingers spread—an avatar of outrage.

These are achieved photographs. Also, they are fragments for a cinema. Our response to them is unstinting, beyond the pull of identification, because the *motion picture*, more than any single aesthetic agency, has trained us to appreciate the still moment that isn't still, the "artistic shot": artistic exactly when it returns life to us stripped of the accidentals that would otherwise vitiate the purity of its emotional appeal, whether the appeal is of hunger, physical grace, despair or of one of the terrible ultimate things. When photography has reached the limit of its dramatizing resources so that you wait spellbound for something further to ensue within the single print: for the Japanese lad to swallow the snowflake; for the hands in stop-motion to finish threading the bolt; for the Peruvian Indian boy either to sound a note from his flute or put it aside and elaborate the charm of his smile while he talks to you—when it has reached this brink of sentience, you may well feel that it has already exceeded its own powers and entered, ironically, a limbo of the incongruous. However persuasively it may enlist our humanity, the documentary photograph is bound to desert one's kinetic anticipation; born of art it yet remains umbilical to life, crying out for its gesture to be developed or terminated, for its form to be depersonalized altogether or extended in space-time. By its assumption of mobility it is condemned to supersession by the motion picture.

Under the immediate spell of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, one recognized that the force of Steichen's collection was largely the result of derivations. The artful arrangement, topical and biographical, involved the several photos in a *cinematic* chronology; the quotations from world literature edited their universality. In a rush of sweeping ingratitude it was possible to regard the exhibit as synthetic and unnecessarily multiple, since Mlle. Falconetti's superb art (in her first and only screen role) had already identified these fugitive notations of the human drama—these and others, past and to come—sustaining in a unified ordeal by closeup all the times and places where men, women and children have hoped, feared, defied and been defeated. The Joan of Falconetti and Dreyer is Ishimoto's girl tied to the tree, beginning to exchange apprehension for terror. She is the psychotic, dejected and self-embraced under a towering blank wall, locked forever in the extremity of a riven ego. She is Ernst Haas's pair of lovers overtaken by time. She is the anger in the bones of all who, like the gnarled Israelite woman, raise a hand in rebellion.

## J. T. BEATY:

### Riddles

Recently I have been having coffee every morning with six or seven engineers and draughtsmen from the P. C. Heine Company. A frequent but not regular member of the group is a Mr Wallace, whom the others seem to have known for several years, an artist whose studio is not far from here. Mr Wallace is a short round man with an incongruously long sad face who affects gentility in dress, manners, and accent. Often he is the butt of their jokes, and generally he is treated with boisterous abuse or mock seriousness, though they privately assure me he is thought very highly of both here and in New York as a portrait painter. Much in him and in his position in the group puzzles me.

Just this morning, for example, we had been sitting over our coffee for about ten minutes when we saw him walking past the huge plate-glass window of the coffee-shop, his homburg at a rakish angle, his walking-stick flipping straight out before him and snapping to heel with a silent *tip*. When he came through the glass door from the blazing sidewalk into the blue glare of the coffee-shop they greeted him as usual with catcalls, groans, and scraping of chairs. He took off his hat, pressed it to his heart, and showed the top of his graying head in a deep reverential bow.

"Gentlemen," he said.

Someone ceremoniously drew up a chrome and plastic chair for him. Without saying a word he sat down on the very edge of the chair, crossed his short puffed hands over the head of his walking-stick, and pursed his lips.

"There goes our coffee hour," one of them said.

"Might as well go back to work," another said, pushing his chair away from the table.

They spoke of him as if he were not there. Indeed, he apparently did not hear them, his eyes seeming to appraise the pastel walls. But his neck muscles were tensed as if straining to keep his head squarely facing the men at the table.

"We don't mind his conversation too much," one of them said, "but when he gets started with those stories . . ."

• "Christ, not those!"

He had been expecting the invitation. His eyes jerked back to the circle of red faces. "Gentlemen," he said, "Dr Cabell assures me I have but one story. It seems more, he says, because I change it constantly."

He spoke softly and precisely in an accent part pseudo-Oxfordian, part Southern, part effeminate. He waited.

"Not the Hungarian model in Paris," they said.

"Not breaking the arms off the statue in Rome," they said.

The waitress brought his coffee. He stirred it briskly, little finger extended, took a cautious sip, started back as if burned, placed the cup and saucer back on the table, and sank back in his chair, looking around at the bright faces and blinking quickly as he faced the sun-flooded window.

He waited until the insults reached some predetermined number and intensity, leaned back contemplatively, and chose from among the numerous requests. He held up his hand and, the rest silent and expectant, began a story about an art class he had taught in Philadelphia, telling the story in precise, clipped sentences which disintegrated as he went along, broad "a's" and dropped "r's" appearing and disappearing like the backs of porpoises as he got deeper and deeper into his story.

"It was many years ago," he began. "I had just returned from my second trip abroad. I was short of funds and was renewing my credit by teaching a life-class at the Pennsylvania Academy. Human figger, you know. That day the model was a truly red-haired young lady. Not simply a red-head, you know.

"Ah, how I still remember her, gentlemen"—he kissed the tips of his fingers—"a certain Miss McCoy." He paused and looked silently and at length at each face in turn. "I shall, gentlemen, refrain from making any obvious remarks concerning the young lady's name."

He stared at the red face directly across from him until he saw it overflow with recognition. While they laughed and slapped each other on the back, he sat looking out the window as if fascinated by the darting reflections of the sunlight on the chrome of the passing cars.

"On this particular day," he said when they had subsided, "a new student arrived. I watched him set up his materials, and, since he seemed to know what he was about, I let him alone. 'Let him get settled,' I said to myself. 'Don't rush him.' So I did not go near him for at least an hour and a half. He was busy working the entire time. Finally, I walked up behind him to see what he had accomplished and perhaps to offer some suggestions. I looked over his shoulder . . ."

He paused, smacked his lips in disapproval, and moved the head of his walking-stick about the circle of faces to rivet the attention of each one. "Gentlemen, what I saw flabbergasted me."

He knitted his brows and began to act out the conversation. "'I say, old man,' I said to him, 'the proper way to draw the human figger is like so'"—Wallace made swift and delicate motions in the air—"center line, head oval, leg, etcetera. But here *you* are, sir," I said to him, 'after an hour and a hahf, and all you have drawn—in painstaking and infinite detail it is true—but all you have drawn is one small triangle of that figgah representing an area not six inches across.'

"And there it was gentlemen—like a flaming torch upon an altar," Wallace said.

"A flaming torch," he repeated. "'How do you explain that, sir?' I asked him.

"Well, you see, sir," he answered with neither embarrassment nor hesitation, 'to tell you the truth, sir, that's all I'm interested in.'"

Wallace leaned forward and took another sip of coffee while they guffawed and slapped each other on the back. Soon they were silent except for an occasional dry giggle. Some wiped their eyes. Then they remembered.

"When did you change that one?" they said.

"You know I never . . ." he said.

"You must have," they said. "We recognize the student, but come on, who really was the instructor?"

They kept it up. Wallace rolled about in his chair from one haunch to the other, leaned first one hand, then the other, then both hands on his walking-stick, laughed, blushed, made half-hearted attempts to deny the role they cast him in. Their jokes grew coarser and more insulting. Again it seemed enough.

"But I say," he said, "I'm not the only one to change stories, you know. I remember a clahss once. I was lecturing on Egyptian art—excavations, and all that, you know. I told them distinctly, distinctly, mind, about that British lord, Lord . . . What *was* his name?"

No one knew.

"Well, 'tany rate, he uncovered King Tut, you remember. The body was marvellously preserved. He was only sixteen, you know, Tut was, when he died. Then, in quite another lecture in the same course, I told them of the Frenchman who found the Rosetta Stone. What was *his* name? Champignon, or something like that."

• "That's a mushroom," somebody said.



"Quite right," he said, "a mushroom. But it was something like that, you know. Well, any rate, on the final examination I asked some sort of question about archaeological discoveries in Egypt. One young man informed me that when that Lord So-and-so opened King Tut's tomb the king was found clutching the Rosetta Stone."

"You see, gentlemen," he said triumphantly, "I am not the only one who takes occasional liberties with detail in order to make a more perfect, artistic story."

This anecdote was not so successful, but it was followed by the same kind of bantering, which soon solidified around the question of how Wallace would change the King Tut story in years to come.

"Soon he'll personify it," they said, "and Tut will be found clutching a certain Rosetta Stone."

"Yes," they said, "and of Miss Stone very little will have been left, though Tut was perfectly preserved."

"Very little," they said. "In fact, only a small triangle not more than six inches across."

"Like a flaming torch upon an altar," they said.

They continued to elaborate on the stories but soon the results became simply crude or flat. They no longer even referred to Wallace or to his part in the anecdotes. He sat for a few minutes with his hands folded over the head of his walking-stick looking about at the walls. Then, while their elaborations continued, he got up and walked swiftly through the door onto the sun-drenched sidewalk. The coffee circle soon broke up.

Before going back to work I strolled down by the river thinking of Wallace and of how difficult it is to discover feelings and attitudes. He could not be ignorant of the derision in their tone of amused acceptance of him, but he neither objected nor disregarded it. He actually invited the derision. What compelled him to behave that way? Was he really an accomplished artist? If so, why did he court the favor of those red-faced men? And how about their attitude? Why did they hasten to tell me how well thought of he was? Was he a symbol to them? Did they feel that in knowing him, in insulting him, in being superior to him, they confirmed their superiority over a whole continent of experience they knew nothing of? Or was I to blame? Was this just good fellowship, friendly horse-play? Was I supplying the derision, the undertones, the seriousness?

But as I stood and looked out over the river, out over the tiny waves winking in the bright sunlight, these questions melted into

the memory of the stories he had told, of Egypt and King Tutankhamen, and therefore, of course, of my grandfather.

My maternal grandfather died at the very dawn of my memory, and in that weak and early light his image is perhaps shadowy and distorted. Much of what I think I remember of him is probably based on pictures of him I have seen since and anecdotes about him told me by my mother. Tall, with a white moustache and Van Dyke, he resembled those royal cousins, Czar Nicholas, Kaiser Wilhelm, and King George V. His back was straight, though he must have been nearly seventy when I was born and though he had spent most of those years stooped over, sewing a lady's coat or dress. When I was born he had a little shop on the ground floor front of a three-story, marble-stepped house in East Baltimore. I remember the shop and the house, though I was only six when my grandfather died and my grandmother moved away. I seem to recall some of the details that surrounded his death, though these memories may not be matters of fact. I believe my mother was sitting up with him when he died. I believe I stayed in the house for two or three days either just before or just after he died. Either his sickness or his death frightened me. I remember that in one of the corners of the room in which I slept there was a thick pipe with a large, strange valve of some sort that assumed the shape of a man or a monster when the lights were out and I could see only by the gas street-lamps outside my window.

My grandfather was a silent man. I do not remember ever having heard him speak. He rarely spoke, my mother tells me, to any of his own children; perhaps he did not even speak to his wife. Every one in the family was amazed that, when my father was courting my mother despite my grandmother's disapproval, the old man spoke to him. My uncles still tell me from time to time that my grandfather spoke more to my father in four months than he did to all six of them in all their lives.

Every lunchtime during their school days, my mother, the youngest in the family, and Ed, the youngest son, would go into the shop in the front of the house and sit on the dark mahogany bench against the rear wall, intoning alternately and then together, "Pa-a-a gi' me a cent."

He would sit facing the large window through which came the weak winter sunlight, peering down at a dress or coat on his lap with his near-sighted eyes, his back to them, apparently paying no attention. They would keep up the chant for five minutes, for fifteen

minutes, a half-hour. Then, at the very last minute, when they just had time to stop in the candy-store, snatch a candy each and dash to school, just at this moment, he would take out his little purse, peer closely into it, fumble out two pennies—which he always had—and, without turning around, would throw them one at a time behind him on the floor.

"There!" he would say—his first word—and, "There!" his last.

A few years after this practice had ceased my mother went into the shop to talk to him. "Pa," she said, "I need a dress. Could you make me a dress?"

"A dress? What for?" he said, not looking up.

"For graduation, Pa."

"Graduation?" He shook his head. "What are you graduating from?"

"High school," she said.

"High school!" he said, looking up at her over his glasses. "Tell me, Ruthie," he said to her, "how old are you now?"

Then, a few years later still, just before my mother was married—and perhaps because my father talked with him, perhaps for some other reason—he secretly made my mother a dress.

He was already old then, and his eyesight had been worsening for some time. He was no longer working regularly but would sit in the kitchen by the stove drinking tea, or, both hands resting on the oilcloth that covered the round kitchen table, would simply stare off into space or into time or into himself. Occasionally he would go into the shop and sit at his work table staring out onto the street through the dark and dirty window. Sometimes he picked up a piece of work and went through the motions of sewing; therefore no one suspected, when he stayed in the shop during those weeks, that he was preparing a surprise for my mother.

It was about that time that the tomb of King Tutankhamen was opened, and the world was throbbing with the news. No war to write about, radios just beginning to appear in the middle-class home, Coolidge in his heaven almost as silent as my grandfather, all wars over and progress and riches mocking the self-pitying lost generation, this discovery seemed to be one more piece fitted into the universal jigsaw puzzle that man was soon to complete. A pyramid today; tomorrow the riddle of the Sphinx. Everything was Tut. And among the countless products manufactured which spread his fame was a

beautiful silk cloth upon which was printed a repeated design of pyramids half in sunlight and half in shadow. It was from this cloth that my grandfather was making the dress.

One morning he called my mother into the shop. It was unusual to be addressed by her father, still more unusual to be asked into the shop. She said she hoped there was nothing wrong. He assured her that there was nothing wrong. He was silent for a few moments. She could tell nothing from his face; his blue eyes were magnified unnaturally by his new thick glasses, but they were, as usual, as expressionless as sapphires.

"There!" he said, picking up a tissue-paper-wrapped package from the work table, thrusting it into her hands and turning away. "Try it on."

She went behind the dressing-screen and came out in her new dress, sick with gratitude, tenderness, and pity.

"You like it?" he said.

"Papa," she said, "it's beautiful, simply beautiful," and she ran to him crying.

He pushed her away gently, shaking his head no. "There," he said, as if throwing the penny to her, "take it off and put it away. There!" He waved his hand as if to banish her.

She put it away. Often she would take it out and feel the material and look at the careful, beautiful workmanship, each stitch a kiss he had not given her, a word he had not spoken to her. She would put it on and go down to the kitchen or the shop before she went out and say, "See, Papa, how do you like the way I look in my new dress?"

He would not look up but would wave his banishing hand at her very slowly. Then she would sneak upstairs, take the dress off, and put it away carefully in the tissue-paper. She did that the night she eloped with my father.

"I'm glad he never knew," she told me. "His eyes got worse and worse toward the end. He never knew the pyramids were upside down."

I stood looking out over the river. Though I squinted in the bright sunlight and peered very hard, I could not tell which way the tiny waves were flowing. I wondered what Wallace meant and was he or was he not a fool, and what my grandfather meant, sitting silently in the dark kitchen or gray shop. And I thought of King

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Tutankhamen and how he would now forever stand in memory half in sunlight, half in shadow, like the design of the pyramids on the silk that I had never seen.

## ARTHUR CARSON:

### Winter, the Waiter

During the beginning we watched and saw the end  
become soft and touchable and we knew  
we could not escape.

Then, as we became confused, we knew  
there was no beginning and probably no end,  
and the girl brought us a basket of duck eggs.  
We could not find our way around  
but when we called the waiter, he trapped us,  
and we could suddenly see ourselves there  
with our heads tilted at the music  
and our glinting sins like daggers at our sides  
and all our forgotten, long-forgotten, dead around us,  
and all of it was like a bright flower  
                    in a frosted morning,  
bursting.

### Ananke

We have been touched by rivers  
So that we turn in their directions  
And flow into the sea.  
We have been turned by rivers and winds  
And go like electric birds, magnetized  
Along invisible wires.  
We sink deep into the sea  
Like a rock upon which a round-eyed fish is painted.

## RUDOLPH PELLINAT:

### The River

Here is a little boy went walking in the woods  
And saw the woods become a river:  
And the river went flowing—

The river became a pool,  
The pool became an owl:

And the owl went whooping—  
Here is a black owl went winging in the woods  
And flew into a darkness cave:

The cave became a pool,  
The pool became a river:

And the river went flowing—  
Here is a little boy went drowning in the woods  
And flew into a darkness cave.

## BYRON VAZAKAS:

### Whitman under the Aegis of Boston

I thought of Emerson tonight as I  
hiked through the Common down from Beacon Hill  
as though a classic route somehow shook all  
the classic dust clean from my feet. Elms gleamed.  
Glass flashed. And sunset dialed the Bulfinch bows.  
We'd argued, as we walked, agreeably.  
But now it's Autumn. Then cold iced the eaves.  
It's Autumn, yes. But cold and death are one.  
And democratic vistas stiffen here  
until I wonder if this place or I  
am alien. I baited Emerson.  
I teased him that acceptance was this cold  
that froze the blood into its tyranny;  
• and like this rigid season would creep back

from older censorships to witch the flow  
 of love and knowledge, moral anarchists.  
 He growled, but granted that enforcement led  
 the transcendental to theocracy.  
 Still arguing, we crossed the street, and had  
 a damned good steak at the American.

## BERNICE SLOTE:

### Garden, with Jane

Jane (call her Janus) the second-prize girl  
 (So she won, so she lost)—Jane I say came forth  
 By candlemas moon and counted her prayers,  
 One two three. And almost finished the birth

Of a next one, yet not quite. All three  
 Were prayers the saints had bled for her, given in fee  
 For Jane to savor. The last was her own.  
 She wept then . . . over the lover not so tall

As the woman he walks with . . . over the hand  
 That clicks the alarm off early, early. Wept  
 For donkeys and mushrooms . . . nobody's prayers . . .  
 And the red red apple hanging ready to fall.

### Perce

Like a bobbin, body flickers  
 Land to sea, wound on spiced  
 Interior pines, the flowered field  
 And valley of Gaspé; wound  
 On deep Arthurian mist the sea  
 Recovers, on titan rocks that rise  
 Beyond the port, and tidal waste  
 Of northern waters billowing.

Feet cling to the stony edge of day  
 Until the boat skims out to where  
 In tiers the gulls clamor the rock,  
 And farther over the whitening roll.

But even Ishmael turned to the green  
Land, knew the insular  
Tahiti where the center holds.  
And so the boat rings back to home.

The bobbin shuttles on the point  
Percé. Once more the Frenchman smiles  
And leads her to the grassy hill:  
*Raspberries, blueberries, here in the sun.*  
His eyes tangle the skein of light  
And thread her in, even the while  
She whirls to seaward, fugitive.  
*Halifax there, and Newfoundland,*  
*Over the rim of the last red rock.*

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## CONTRIBUTORS

J. T. BEATY teaches at V.M.I. "Riddles" is his first published story.

KENNETH BURKE'S *Book of Moments, Poems 1915-1954* was recently issued by Hermes Publications.

ARTHUR CARSON, a student at Berkeley, has appeared in *Poetry, Perspective*, etc.

THOMAS H. CARTER, formerly the editor of *Shenandoah*, lives in Nashville.

SANFORD EDELSTEIN'S poetry is being featured in New Ventures' new pamphlet series.

YVAN GOLL'S "John Landless" poems, translated by several American writers, will be collected in 1956 in a Beechurst Press volume supervised by his widow, Claire Goll.

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN'S *The Armed Vision* has just been reprinted by Vintage Books.

RUDOLPH PELLINAT is a young Chicago writer. This is his first published poem.

J. F. POWERS is soon to publish his second story collection, *The Presence of Grace*.

BERNICE SLOTE, of Lincoln, Neb., has contributed to many poetry magazines.

WILLIAM JAY SMITH, best known as a poet, is at work on a novel, *The Straw Market*.

RADCLIFFE SQUIRES, author of *Where the Compass Spins*, teaches at Michigan.

BYRON VAZAKAS, a frequent contributor to the quarterly, lives in Cambridge.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' newest book of poems, *Journey to Love*, is just out.

VERNON YOUNG, film critic for *Arts Digest*, is now living in New York City.

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## KENNETH BURKE:

### The Criticism of Criticism

R. P. BLACKMUR: *The Lion and the Honeycomb; Essays in Solicitude and Critique*. Harcourt, Brace.

Mr. Blackmur is first of all a technical critic, an analyst of texts, (a "New Critic"), one of the best we have. Second, he makes social observations that impart an air of distinction to the life of books (an accomplishment especially welcome to any of us who may hope that books of our own may somehow some day make us, if not distinguished, then at least distinguishable). Third, he sometimes puts forth statements of policy, quasi-diplomatic releases designed to serve some turn in the rhetoric, or politics, of the republic of letters.

Not that these emphases are always confined to separate essays. Sometimes they are relatively pure, sometimes interwoven. And even in discussion of one particular author, his concerns are regularly on the side of criticism in general (as with his "radical allegiance to language," if we may apply to him a formula that he applies to T. S. Eliot). Hence, the title, "the criticism of criticism," for this review of his new book.

From the standpoint of readers especially interested in the resources and embarrassments of words, I think that one of the most fertile things this critic, or any critic, ever did in technical criticism was his analysis of the word "flower" as used in E. E. Cummings. In this essay (the first in his first collection of critical essays, *The Double Agent*) Mr. Blackmur was working at rock bottom—and one might adopt or adapt his observations without necessarily sharing his attitude or putting his remarks to the same use.

The present collection does not reprint this. (However, it was reprinted in his third volume of criticism, *Language as Gesture*.) But another early essay, a masterly piece of characterization, "The Critical Prefaces of Henry James," does reappear. Perhaps the two best pieces of characterization in the present collection are another essay on Henry James, and an attempt to give the gist of Eliot's criticism, "In the Hope of Straightening Things Out."

The new James essay gravitates about problems of form along lines in keeping with Aristotle's *Poetics*. However, despite the Jamesian slogan, "Dramatise it!" (a slogan that led James dramatically to view his problems primarily in terms of "act," "agent," and "scene") there are notable differences between the application of this formula to drama proper and its extension to problems of the novel. Mr. Blackmur does not attempt as thoroughly or systematically as critics like Ronald Crane or Elder Olson might, to differentiate between the principles of drama and those of the novel. Possibly he is deterred somewhat by his pudency as regards what he calls "methodology." But in any case, his close looks at the texts he is discussing make everything he says worth watching here, and do expertly follow the leads of Aristotle's method, in considering the Jamesian novel primarily from the standpoint of its nature as a literary species.

Shopping about among the seventeen pieces here assembled, and trying to survey as fairly as possible in a brief space the mere contents of the book, let us first give tidings of the pieces not already mentioned or not to be discussed later:

"The Politics of Human Power" is a review of Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination*. Here Mr. Blackmur subscribes to "the tory anarchy which is just the other side of liberalism." He holds that "The true business of literature, as of all intellect, critical or creative, is to remind the powers that be, simple and corrupt as they are, of the turbulence they have to control. There is a disorder vital to the individual which is fatal to society."

"The Artist as Hero" considers such "expressionistic" heroes as those in Dostoevski, Joyce, Gide, Mann's *Dr. Faustus*—for "the place where morals hit hardest on the arts is in the center, where the hero is."

"The Economy of the American Writer" is built about the thought that "the theory of a cultural market does not work."

"The American Literary Expatriate" is an exceptionally good survey of variations in the type, including the species that "stayed at home and practiced ingrown expatriation." The essay includes many astute references to the social and economic elements that figured in the phenomenon. It is indebted to Henry James at one end and to Mr. Malcolm Cowley at the other, though only James gets quoted.

"The Expense of Greatness" is an efficient digest giving us the gist of Henry Adams. "I want to regard him as he often chose to regard himself, as a representative example of education: but education pushed to the point of failure as contrasted with ordinary education which stops at the formula of success." For: "Success is not the propitious term for education unless the lesson wanted is futile. Education has no term and if arrested at all is only arrested by impassable failure." This is an early essay (1936), and perhaps Mr. Blackmur himself would be willing to grant that it could profit by greater stress upon Adams' use of the dialectic pair, "multiplicity" and "unity," with the colonies of terms that come to cluster about these poles.

"The Everlasting Effort" treats of T. E. Lawrence and his "problem of the obsessed sensibility." ("We say that Dante was a master of disgust; lacking St. Thomas and Aristotle, Lawrence is a master of disgorgement.")

"The Craft of Herman Melville" discusses Melville's "radical inability to master a technique—that of the novel—radically foreign to his sensibility."

"Humanism and Symbolic Imagination" builds up Mr. Blackmur's notion of the "symbolic imagination" by contrast with the doctrines of Irving Babbitt, who "was a praiser of gone times because he had none of his own." This look back at Babbitt's legislating brings the author close to vehemence, as when he says of Babbitt: "In almost the exact measure that he secures assent to his main position he rouses antipathy by the blows—blind, brutal, and arrogant—which he strikes from it." However, I just happen to have been reading a paper, "Irving Babbitt and Benedetto Croce," by Folke Leander; and I was here reminded that, for all the shortcomings of Babbitt when on the relation between poetry and ethics, his stress upon the "inner check" does serve to bring out the essentially *negative* aspect of "conscience." But there's no denying that, by the rhetorical and/or dialectical device of defining the idea of the "symbolic imagination" by antithesis to Babbitt, Mr. Blackmur at least makes us feel very forcefully what such imagination is *not*.

In "Notes on Four Categories in Criticism," these four divisions are proposed: (1) "superficial techniques," such as metre, plot, stanza, rhyme, alliteration; (2) "linguistic technique," such as images, tropes, and idiom, which is "speech

breathing with perception"; (3) "the ulterior technique of the imagination," by which is apparently meant the elements of cultural background that may be necessary to an understanding of a work, elements that can be lost and that can be restored somewhat by historical criticism, conventions that served as authority even when rejected (what Malinowski might have called the "context of situation," or Carl Becker the "climate of opinion" that may be lost insofar as it is merely implied in a given work); (4) the "symbolic imagination," by which an "image" becomes a "symbol." The previously-mentioned negative approach to the "symbolic imagination" is here matched by a very good positive example, thus:

In *Madame Bovary* the widowed doctor reaches the desire to marry Emma when he sees her tip her head back and insert her tongue into a cordial glass: she is given as nubile, ripe, romantic, and ready. In this image—this touch of the actual—are present, by authority, the institutions, conventions, and fictional formulas that have to do with marriage. Flaubert knows how little he has to put in—the tongue in the glass—and how much he can leave out—all the human needs that are conveyed in marriage . . .

And later, with a just stress upon the element of anticipation in form, he says:

In *Madame Bovary* is it not Flaubert's *anticipation* of Emma's collapse exactly what leads to it and makes it inevitable? There was nothing in the situation that might not have been changed by a single different step; but then the satisfaction of the anticipation would have been lost and the book would have fallen apart. Is it not perhaps the actuality of that anticipation that craves reality? . . . As she collapses she becomes a symbol satisfying Flaubert's anticipation and much more, articulating in her figure and in the configuration of the novel both the anticipation of the author and the actuality of her experience.

The reference to *Flaubert's* anticipation is perhaps a bit misleading, as here quoted. It refers to the ways in which Flaubert, by his ways of anticipation, produced a *book* that shapes our anticipations as readers.

"Between the Numen and the Moha" is an ingenious refurbishment of two old dialectical favorites, variously called mind-body, spirit-matter, spirit-letter. It contains a brief anecdotal interlude (the page-long section III) that is picturesquely morbid (suggesting somewhat the sort of effect Mann sometimes gets in hospital scenes). The tenor of the chapter is indicated in the reference to "the sickness of our times, which have invented the term 'ideology' and have puerilized the term 'dialectic'"; accordingly, "If there is a destructive criticism of Mann's novels, it is that his conceptual structure is sometimes so schematic that it invades and destroys his substance." All told: "This is one of the ways the struggle between the *Numen* and the *Moha* actually takes place." Though Mr. Blackmur thought highly enough of this essay to end on it, I cannot give it the attention it thus would seem to deserve. In particular, his working of the refrain, "I have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" seems a bit rhetorically forced. But the closing words do provide a most appealing resonant note to end on:

Was it not the old peasant, in *War and Peace*, who cured Pierre by his nightly proverbial prayer in the garden of their prison: Let me lie down, oh God, like a stone, and wake like fresh bread? That is, between the *Numen* and the *Moha*.

"Dante's Ten Terms for the Treatment of the Treatise" is perhaps Mr. Blackmur's most forthright sally into dialectic, here on the subject of poetics, and in line with Dante's definition of poetry as a "rhetorical fiction." It is built around Dante's description of the *Divine Comedy*, as "poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive; and likewise proceeding by definition, division, proof, refutation, and setting forth of examples." Mr. Blackmur tentatively makes pairs of terms by variously matching the terms and speculating on the results. He uses this dialectic maneuvering heuristically to suggest perspectives on various literary works, as when he says: "Miranda is poetic definition; *The Alchemist* is fictive division; Proust is descriptive proof; *Joseph in Egypt* is digressive refutation; *Lear* or *Hamlet* is transumptive example." He goes on to list the remaining possible pairs, though he does not give any applications that these other sets may have suggested to him, and he does not apply the scheme elsewhere in the book.

The essay that gives the book its title is decidedly in the third of the classes I mentioned at the beginning of this review. It is a statement of policy . . . designed to serve some turn in the rhetoric, or politics, of the republic of letters. In keeping with the genius of his subtitle for the book, I assume that he would class it among his "solicitudes."

Dated 1950, it calls for a new start, beyond the "New Criticism." Asserting that the New Critics, including himself, had been too exclusively concerned with problems of rhetoric, he calls upon them to repent somewhat, not by dropping rhetoric, but by adding two other dimensions: dialectic and poetic.

I would gladly have joined in his clarion call. I'd have come shouting "Me too!" But alas, without referring to any specific treatment of dialectic in my writings, or to items of mine that I would place in the field of poetics, Mr. Blackmur says that "In Mr. Burke rhetoric always does all the work."

This severe sentence is offered also as prophecy for my subsequent work, with regard to which Mr. Blackmur says: "If we remember that one of Mr. Burke's favorite key devices is contained in the remark that language is either *symbolic* action or symbolic *action*, I think we may hazard it that rhetoric will be doing the work in the symbolic."

Part of the trouble may be due to the fact that different people draw the line between poetic and rhetoric at different places. For instance, we saw Mr. Blackmur himself quoting Dante's definition of poetry as *fictio rhetorica*. Similarly, the line of demarcation between rhetoric and dialectic wavers (as one might expect in the light of Aristotle's observation that rhetoric is the "counterpart" of dialectic). In this same essay, Mr. Blackmur states abruptly, "Dialectic has nothing to do with Hegel"—and if that's the end of Hegel, what right have others to complain? But as regards the possibility of accentuating the expression "symbolic action" on either the adjective or the noun: I would consider it a dialectical fact that an expression compounded of two elements can be slanted two ways, though such a *dialectical* potentiality can be exploited for *rhetorical* purposes. For instance, if you define poetry as "an imitation of life," you have an expression that slopes two ways, since some observers can stress the nature

of the imitation, while others can stress the ways in which the imitation derives vitality from its origins in real life. And if you wanted to sum up this distinction by a shift of accent (a resource natural to language as tonal gesture) you could say that one school hears the expression as "*imitation* of life," while the other hears it as "*imitation of life*." And whereas *rhetorical* battles of the books could arise from these choices, we could look upon them as grounded in a *dialectical* condition, a duality of possibilities implicit in the compound expression itself.

Somewhere in the Shawcross edition of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* there is a similar observation, with regard to the distinction between "imagination" and "fancy." It is suggested that you might think of imagination as "*unity* in diversity" and of fancy as "*unity in diversity*." And if Mr. Blackmur, in a dialectical exercise, would permit himself to consider many possible "permutations and combinations" among ten terms of Dante's, surely this analyst of "*language as gesture*" (or "*language as gesture*"?) should allow for the possible heuristic shift of an accent as a way of revealing the elements of dialectical instability that may be concealed in a term.

Surprisingly, though the "Lion" essay calls for "the mutually related and interinanimated modes of poetic, dialectic, and rhetoric," it itself is essentially an exercise in rhetoric, built around the rhetorical use of Yeats's poem on the "Second Coming." (That is, the poem is introduced not as a theme for study as poetics, but in order that its imagery may be exploited by the essayist for rhetorical purposes, to dissuade an audience.) Yeats having vatically prophesied along Spenglerian lines that the world is in decay and that a repugnant Caesarish Rough Beast will arise, Mr. Blackmur suggests that the New (= Rhetorical) Criticism fits the sinister recipe. This Criticism he next identifies with a somewhat ungainly term, "methodology." All told, he builds up this persuasive set of equations: New Criticism = exclusive stress upon Rhetoric = "Mere anarchy . . . loosed upon the world" = "methodology."

"Methodology" *could* mean simply the systematic criticism of method. In this regard, it could be related to professional scruples on the part of a critic who paused in his criticism of others' poetry to criticize his own criticism. As so viewed, one might grant its proneness to excess, without feeling that it was to be identified with Yeats's horrendous Rough Beast, as in this essay.

However, Mr. Blackmur's treatment of it is not *exclusively* rhetorical. "Method becomes methodology," he says, "when a means becomes an end." Though this formula is often used rhetorically, it does have a grounding in dialectic. But ironically enough, any really thorough analysis of the ways in which means tend to usurp the role of ends will be good in proportion as it itself thinks along methodological lines. There is a sense, for instance, in which even the best of art could be called a transforming of means into ends (as when an artistic medium is used for its own sake rather than for some utilitarian purpose, or when a poet uses sheerly as poetic forms the rhetorical devices which an orator uses to make an audience change its mind in some controversial issue).

As part of his program, Mr. Blackmur also pleads for a greater concern with Aristotle's Poetics. To this end, he selects, for intelligent relish, certain of Aristotle's key terms, which he places succinctly and aptly. However, since he is stressing essentials, I wish he had taken the further space needed to bring out the importance of Aristotle's concern with literary works in terms of their nature as *species*. For this is the very essence of Aristotle's approach to his subject, and

it is a matter often neglected in post-Crocean criticism.

The omission has strategic bearing upon one of the definitions. I refer to Mr. Blackmur's definition of tragic catharsis as "the purging, cleansing, purifying of the *mythos* subject to *mimesis*." That is, he here treats catharsis as a process sheerly internal to the work, quite as though, through "incidents arousing pity and fear," the poetic action of the work so "accomplished its catharsis of such emotions" that the story itself could be considered as undergoing the purge. And the loss of Aristotle's writings on poetic catharsis, along with the fact that he treated of this subject in the *Poetics* rather than in the *Rhetoric*, helps us all the more to assume that Aristotle was here discussing the symbolic purging not of the *audience*, but of the *plot* (which he variously calls the end, purpose, principle, life, and soul of tragedy).

But though I incline to share what I take to be Mr. Blackmur's feeling, that poetics should ideally treat of a work in its internality, and though I think we should aim as fully as possible at a purely internal account of "catharsis," there seems good reason to doubt that Aristotle had such purely internal reference in mind when thinking of "catharsis." For he is very much concerned with the nature of tragic pleasure. And whereas one might, for methodological reasons, legitimately object to introducing here his references to catharsis in the *Politics* (where the term deals with the purging of tendencies toward political unrest), surely we can make up for the loss of the section on purgation in the *Poetics* by citing related lines from his treatise on Music, which he classes as another kind of *mimesis* (that is, imitation, or, in my proposed heuristic translation, "symbolic action"). Here he writes:

Music should be studied, not for the sake of one, but of many benefits, that is to say, with a view to education and purgation (the word "purgation" we use at present without explanation, but when hereafter we speak of poetry, we will treat the subject with more precision). . . . In education the most ethical modes are to be preferred, but in listening to the performances of others we may admit the modes of action and passion also. For feelings such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies—when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy—restored as though they had found healing and purgation. Those who are influenced by pity or fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all are in a manner purged and their souls lightened and delighted. The purgative melodies likewise give an innocent pleasure to mankind. Such are the modes and melodies in which those who perform music at the theatre should be invited to compete. But since the spectators are of two kinds—the one free and educated, and the other a vulgar crowd composed of mechanics, laborers, and the like—there ought to be contests and exhibitions instituted for the relaxation of the second class also. And the music will correspond to their mind; for as their minds are perverted from the natural state, so there are perverted modes and highly strung and unnaturally colored melodies.

Here, obviously, Aristotle is discussing catharsis, not as a "purifying" or unfolding of the melodic line, but as a response that music aroused *in an audience*. And precisely at this point he refers to his use of the term in the Poetics. A lesser reason for thinking that the formula can deal with a rhetorical consideration (the "purifying" effect that the work has *upon an audience*) is that questions of audience appeal are considered elsewhere in the Poetics (hence, are not categorically excluded). And modern works, such as George Thomson's *Aeschylus and Athens*, studying the derivation of secular tragedy from a religious ceremony, can justify us in looking for its corresponding function as a kind of *secular "medicine,"* however modified, and however amply analyzable in its own right.

One other point should be mentioned as regards this titular essay. When setting up Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* as another norm to be followed, Mr. Blackmur focuses on three terms: *esemplastic*, *coadunative*, and *synergical*. He gives a brief definition of each, in accordance with his own interpretation of them.

Since I don't know where "synergical" appears in Coleridge's works, and since Mr. Blackmur gives us no quotations from Coleridge, though he does well by it we cannot wholly share his relish in it. But it looks like a term that might be profitably scrutinized for a possible relation to the doctrine of "synergism." (There seems a chance that, whereas the theological term designates a heresy, its analogue in Coleridge might reveal interesting transformations when thus transplanted).

As regards the other terms, "*esemplastic*" and "*coadunative*," there is the opportunity for a closer look; and I think that Mr. Blackmur's definitions require a closer look; for otherwise the reader may puzzle himself in an attempt to discern a distinction where none may really exist.

"*Esemplastic*" he defines as: "forming, shaping, at a rhetorical level if you take rhetoric as a creative agent." And "*coadunative*" he defines as "having to do with the union of similar substances, at a dialectical level if you take dialectic as an aesthetic agent." He nowhere quotes from Coleridge to establish this distinction. And I greatly doubt whether he could find any quotations to back him. I think he is improvising here (perhaps in accordance with his own wisecrack elsewhere, that there is a taint of "original genius" in our critics). So far as I can make out, the terms are wholly synonymous, except that one of them is an artificial construct of Coleridge's from Greek elements, the other being the nearest equivalent from the Latin (*coadunatio* is in the big Harpers' Latin Dictionary).

Let us consider a passage from the collection of Coleridge fragments, *Anima Poetae*. Here the words seem to be used interchangeably, though one of them appears in a slightly modified form. (As has been noted in the Shawcross edition of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge seems to have read something into the German that is not etymologically there, but no matter.)

How excellently the German *Einbildungskraft* expresses this prime and loftiest faculty, the power of co-adunation, the faculty that forms the many into one—in-eins-bildung! Eisenoplasy, or esenoplasic power, is contradistinguished from fantasy, or the mirrorment, either catoptric or metoptric—repeating simply, or by transposition—and, again, involuntary as in dreams, or by an act of the will.

Here, you will note, he specifically uses "co-adunation" to name imagination, or "the faculty that forms the many into one." But in his *Biographia Literaria*, his subtitle for chapter XIII is "On the imagination, or esemplastic power." And there is the much-quoted passage at the beginning of chapter X, where he made up the Greek form of his term "from the Greek words, *eis hen plaittein*, to shape into one."

It seems to me that Mr. Blackmur is here asking his readers to use the terms in accordance with a distinction that Coleridge himself did not make. And the distinction is explained by another distinction that in itself needs to be explained. I refer to his distinction between: "esemplastic" as rhetorical "if you take rhetoric as a creative agent"; and "co-adunative" as dialectical "if you take dialectic as an aesthetic agent."\*

In another essay that we would class among the statements of policy, "A Burden for Critics," Mr. Blackmur builds his position around three Latin formulae: *Omnis intellectus omniformis est; fides quaerens intellectus; corruptio optima pessima*. The second and third are slightly wrong, with corresponding errors in translation. In the case of the third, the difference is negligible. And elsewhere in the book it appears correctly. But the slight difference in the second makes for a notable difference in translation that is worth dwelling on. For it is not a mere error; rather, in the form he gave it, it reveals something essential about the dialectic pattern that seems to lie at the basis of his thinking.

Mr. Blackmur writes:

The temptation of the Middle Ages was to identify God with either one's own knowledge of him or with one's particular form of faith. *Fides quaerens intellectus* is a motto meant to redeem that temptation; for it is faith alone that may question the intellect, as it is only the intellect that can curb faith. The very principle of balance, together with the radical precariousness of its nature, lies in the reversibility of this motto.

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\* So far as I can see, the line "Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze" (in the "Eolian Harp" poem) is dealing with the same unifying effect of the imagination as this note in *Anima Poetae*:

As when the taper's white cone of flame is seen double, till the eye moving brings them into one space and then they become one—so did the idea in my imagination coadunate with your present form soon after I first gazed upon you.

In another note Coleridge speaks of feelings being "more confused, and thereby, coadunated"—then continues: "Just as white is the very emblem of one in being the confusion of all." Coleridge attributes this unifying power of imagination to Wordsworth as a poet; and such poetic faculty (which, at the end of chapter XIII he calls the "secondary Imagination") is either "esemplastic" or "co-adunative," as you prefer.

The only possible distinction I can see concerns not public dictionary meanings but private poetic overtones. When Coleridge writes that *plaittein* means "to shape into one," we catch a glimpse of the way in which his critical word *esemplastic* and his poetic word *plastic* (used with reference to his vision of ideal unity, in his "Eolian Harp" poem) both contain, at one remove, a word that was greatly resonant for him: the word "shape." To pick but three spots along its fatally ambiguous range: "These shapings of the unregenerate mind"; "A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!"; "My shaping spirit of Imagination." The word "coadunative" would lack the traces of "shape" that lurk in "esemplastic."



The traditional formula accredited to St. Anselm has not *intellectus* but *intellectum*, (an accusative where Mr. Blackmur puts a nominative). Grammatically, there is no "reversibility" in this version of the formula. It can be translated in but one direction: "faith seeking understanding." And as regards the doctrinal nature of the formula, St. Anselm himself happens to have explicitly discussed its singleness of direction. "Right order requires," he says, "that we believe the profundities of Christian faith, before we presume to discuss them rationally." (*Rectus ordo exigit, ut profunda Christianae fidei credamus, priusquam ea praesumamus ratione discutere*. See on Anselm in the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.)

Emile Bréhier's history, *La Philosophie du Moyen Age*, makes it clear that the singleness of direction was re-enforced by a third stage, *intellectus* being but an intermediate step between faith and vision (or *contemplatio*), which transcends the ergotizing ways of the understanding. And in Chapter II of his *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale*, Etienne Gilson brings out the same irreversibility thus:

*La hiérarchie traditionnelle des modes de connaissance, chez les penseurs chrétiens, est toujours la foi, l'intelligence, la vue de Dieu face à face: "Inter fidem et speciem," écrit saint Anselme, "intellectum quem in hac vita capimus esse medium intelligo."*

True, there is a sense in which the third member of a three-term dialectic may look like a state of "reversibility" between both members of a two-term dialectic. As regards the dialectical design of Hegel (*absit nomen!*), the "synthesis" has certain elements in common with the "thesis" and others in common with the "antithesis." And if you were compelled to state this three-term relationship in a two-term system, about the nearest you could come to it would presumably be by treating the two terms as mutually checking each other, except insofar as you might, with another accent, treat them as mutually re-enforcing each other.

We should further note that, despite the triadic nature of the thinking behind St. Anselm's formula, it is dyadic on its face, and has in history repeatedly gravitated towards a two-term pattern, with *fides* and *intellectus* as the two slopes, and *quaerens* as the ambiguously intermediate sloper. But our main point is that Mr. Blackmur's notion of two terms, with a relation of "reversibility" between the terms, seems typical of his own thinking. Also it seems to be the dialectical pattern underlying the first essay in his book, an essay which we turn to next.\*

With his first essay, "Towards a Modus Vivendi," we face the full complexity of our problem. In the titular essay, "The Lion and the Honeycomb" (dated 1950), Mr. Blackmur had called for the subordination of rhetoric to poetic and dialectic. But in the much later essay with which his book begins, he deals

\* As regards the sheer grammar of the Latin formula, I assume that, in interpreting it as reversible, Mr. Blackmur had something of this sort in mind: The two nouns *fides* and *intellectus* were to be considered as nominatives, in apposition. The participle *quaerens* midway between them was to be thought of as capable of shifting its attachment to either one or the other of the nouns. An inspection of such dialectical resources would suggest either *fides quaerens (est) intellectus* or *fides (est) quaerens intellectus*. Or, translating generously, we might get, respectively: "a questing and/or questioning faith is intellect" and "faith is a questing and/or questioning intellect" (or, for the second: "a questing and/or questioning intellect is faith").

exclusively with a rhetorical problem, the relation between writers and audiences. It is an observant article, excellent in its way, a highly reputable contribution to that realm midway between literature and sociology that has been called the sociology of literature.

Though imaginatively written, the essay contains no elements of Poetic. Its stress is overwhelmingly upon a consideration of Rhetoric. And insofar as it is implicitly dialectical, its dialectic is that of a sociologist (dealing, as it does, with problems of "the intellectual proletariat and the technical elite"). Matters are still further complicated for this reviewer by the fact that, despite the strong rhetorical stress in the essay, I find myself obliged to maintain that in one notable respect it is not rhetorical enough!

The essay deals with the problem of the "New Illiteracy," a kind of *corruptio optimi* that "has followed the course of universal education." We here have a report (with facts and figures) of Mr. Blackmur's "reactions to peoples and politics in thirteen months of brief visits to England, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, the Lebanon, and Turkey." Its "bias" is "toward re-creating or even creating *de novo* at the cultural and intellectual level the sense of a *modus vivendi*."

A "new intellectual proletariat" has arisen, we are told, and the corresponding new illiteracy "represents those who have been given the tool of reading . . . without being given either the means or skill to read well or the material that ought to be read." The result is a state of affairs where "the inflammable opinion of the new illiterate is mistaken for the will of the people, so that arson becomes a chief political instrument." All countries need "a larger truly literate class; educated to the needs and purposes of the society." Such an "elite" would be an alternative to "the new intellectual proletariat," the "class of intellectually trained men and women the world over who cannot make a living in terms of their training and who cannot, because of their training, make a living otherwise with any satisfaction." (Mr. Blackmur here offers a superb variation, by the way, on the sociologist Veblen's concept of "trained incapacity.")

"The dilution of literacy, and the intrusion of the new illiteracy into higher education" lead us to "opine that we must *distrust the ability of the audience*," whereupon "we end up inferior to the potential response of the audience." Our "distrust of the audience," resulting from "our distrust of our own reason and our own imagination," leads us to put our faith in such rhetorical resources as "psychological warfare" ("sometimes we call it advertising or aiming at the target").

Next come eight factual pages on the general state of the reading public, the sparse circulation of good magazines, etc., as he found in the course of his travels. (He says some gruesome things about the quality of the "culture" being exported from the United States. But perhaps his most startling remark came earlier: "We find the USIS in Tel Aviv competing against Russia with the Tarzan books as indicator of the American way of life and all its superiority to the Russians who came bringing Tolstoy.") Then follow eight pages built about the "maxim" that "the new illiteracy prevents a *modus vivendi*." Instead of an influential cultured elite, we have "an intellectual proletariat."

In the last five pages, noting that "the paying audience has, under present conditions . . . nowhere grown in relation either to population or to perform-

ance," and avowing that "the problem of audience belongs to education, both within and outside the educational systems," Mr. Blackmur ends earnestly but somewhat vaguely as regards his recommendations.

He is clear enough in his attack upon "professionalism and trades-unionism (of which it is another form)," contending that "professionalism is a form of illiteracy." But on the positive side, we are told only that "the populace must be educated to the level required for the honest and informed discovery of their will" and we should welcome anything that can "persuade" to the "multiplication and heightening of individual intelligence."

Thus, finally:

Some people call the mode of this intelligence in action criticism.  
It had better be called the charity of compassionate understanding.  
Its aim is no less than a *modus vivendi* for those who must live together.

In sum, confronting "the explosions of universal education," Mr. Blackmur seems to be in line with the frequent current plea for major stress upon a general education in the humanities, as against merely vocational education or, what is worse, mere indoctrination for the efficient stimulating of desired responses. Insofar as education can help solve the problem, I imagine that most readers of this magazine and of Mr. Blackmur would agree with such a slant. I certainly do.

But here is where my embarrassment enters. For at this point I find myself required to hold that, on the basis of Mr. Blackmur's own evidence, what we need is not less attention to rhetoric, but more, though not precisely to the kind of "rhetoric" that would be most characteristic of the "New Critics." I would hold that, in the kind of education Mr. Blackmur seems to call for, the *systematic study of rhetoric* be given the high place it had in classical Athens, Rome, during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and after. (It lost its relative importance in the curriculum, I believe, only after the gradual rise of aesthetics during the nineteenth century. Then, being exiled, rhetoric found a partial home in the new "professional" disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, social psychology, "semantics," and in such techniques as the analysis of public opinion.)

I was mildly scandalized once when one of our outstanding critics, writing on Aristotle as literary critic, never so much as mentioned his Rhetoric. Yet Aristotle was, first of all, a teacher of rhetoric. And until contemporary teachers of English overcome a resistance that they inherited from nineteenth-century aesthetics, their views about a general education in the humanities must continue to be quite warped. Mr. Blackmur's view that "Education is a lever, not an evangelist" has much to recommend it, but only if we make sure that education tells us a lot about the levers of evangelism. When Mr. Blackmur warns against the "arson" of a demagogue, does he not automatically pledge us to a jealous study of such arsonists' devices?

Thus when, in his titular article, he called upon contemporary critics in general and upon Ransom, Brooks, Empson, and Burke in particular, to subordinate their overwhelmingly "rhetorical" concerns, he was making a plea that was more complicated than it may have seemed. And not until now have we established the coordinates for our answer, which is:

By all means, let us *lessen* the emphasis upon "rhetoric," insofar as we mean

by rhetoric the concerns inherited simply from nineteenth-century aesthetics. But let us *increase* the emphasis upon rhetoric, insofar as we can replace aesthetics with the classic trio (rhetoric, poetic, dialectic) that Mr. Blackmur commended in his titular essay. If we really give poetics and dialectics their due, as Mr. Blackmur rightly exhorts, then we can safely restore to their rightful place in the study of language such major texts as Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* and Cicero's *Orator* and *De Oratore* (to which I would add at least the fourth part of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, concerning the rhetoric of Christian persuasion).

Thus, as regards the problems of "arson" ("demagoguery and hysteria") we should train ourselves in the art of catching such doings *flagrante delicto*, as the systematic study of rhetoric helps us to do, whereas aesthetics could but coax us to turn our eyes elsewhere, in blushing superior pudency. It is in this sense that one could call simultaneously for less rhetoric and more. Less, if you equate rhetoric with a mere excess of aesthetics (or "methodology," in Mr. Blackmur's special definition of that term). More, if, having discounted aesthetics, you can systematically allow for the full development of rhetoric, dialectic, and poetic, all three.

We have said there is no concern with Poetics in the article (inasmuch as the concern with audiences and with the business of writing is divided between the two provinces of rhetoric and the sociology of literature). As for Dialectic, if you mean the systematic analysis of dialectical resources and embarrassments, you would have to say that it, too, is missing. But a universe of discourse being what it is, every writer necessarily employs a dialectic *implicitly*. And we have tried to suggest that Mr. Blackmur here seems to follow the dialectical pattern indicated in his comments on the *fides quaerens intellectum* formula.

I have in mind particularly the question he asks at the start: "How do we go about converting energy and momentum into intellect?" Here, presumably, "energy and momentum" would be analogous to *fides*, in its role as a kind of initiating intuitive power like faith. Then the cultural task would be to find for this raw drive a truly intellectual counterpart that might properly "curb" it. And if we may postulate the principle of "reversibility" that Mr. Blackmur has advocated as a guide for critics generally, we may assume also that the underlying power would in turn "question" the intellectual frame arising out of it.

The design is complicated, however, by the fact that the underlying power (which he apparently respects, though his essay gives no indication that he did more than sense it beyond the barriers of nationality and language) is not attaining its true cultural counterpart. Instead, it is being corrupted by the "new illiteracy" (the "*kitsch* culture," with its "lip-service, eyewash, and pi-jaw," its "professionalism," and its "packaged goods").

There thus seem to be *two* kinds of "reversibility" here. First, there is a drastically actual kind, whereby the "new illiteracy" that arises in response to the underlying "energy and momentum" provides but a grim caricature of *intellectus* (in a form that not only does not mitigate the original potentialities of rawness but intensifies them). And second, there is a hoped-for ideal kind that would truly represent the underlying possibilities, and thus in its refinement would be expected to act as a "curb" on them.

If I am right in this summary of the dialectical pattern that is at the roots of the essay, I would say that it has one great shortcoming: its failure to show

us evidence of a *wholesome* "energy and momentum" that would be even remotely a match for his evidences of cultural corruption. In brief, the materials for a *fides* are very scant in this article, while the materials for a false *intellectus* are profuse. That is, there is no detailing of a *fides* (as regards whatever evangelical possibilities there may be in the seething local situations which he studied). There is very little of an *intellectus*, in the good sense. So, for the most part, there is little to strike our imagination and thus to feed our contemplation (or "vision") but a very persuasive picture of *intellectus* in the bad sense. We cannot know whether this was all there was to see, or all that Mr. Blackmur was able to see first-hand, beyond the difficulties raised by nationality, language, and tourism.

In any case, it seems to me an exceptionally interesting report, vigorously written, the record of an alert observer. Secondarily, it is an act of self-portraiture: the situations it describes are seen through the eyes of an expert bookman who writes of cultural atrocities and cultural possibilities very entertainingly.

Perhaps to some extent one bit of Hegelian dialectic, as modified by post-Marxist thinking, does figure here after all. I refer to the fact that, though Mr. Blackmur's bias is strongly idealistic (as is perhaps the case with all educators, whether they know it or not and whether they want it or not), he does quite often fall into passages where something much like a variant of the Marxist genealogy is followed. (I refer to a dialectic whereby, beginning with conditions in the economic substructure, one derives from them the state of the ideological superstructure.) Thus, he talks about his alienated intellectuals as an economic class whose consciousness is formed in response to their economic conditions. And again and again, his concern with problems of *literature* centers not in questions of poetics but in matters of *livelihood*.

"Culture is the mind's money," he says, "and everybody not forbidden wants a little of it in his pocket, if only to rattle. Culture is the cash and carry of human action: the one form of currency we ought not to debase, or inflate, but must enrich." That is to perfection a shift of accent, a bright dialectical maneuver whereby, though starting on the material slope, before the sentence is finished, all is spirit.

#### Addendum

I still don't feel that I did wholly right by either Mr. Blackmur or myself as regards the scholastic formula, *fides quaerens intellectum*. The difficulty is that an element of controversy kept interfering with the main thing, which was merely a matter of discussion.

It is to me a notable fact about an author's dialectic when a three-termed system is transformed into a two-termed system, with corresponding subsidiary adjustments. But there is the further consideration that the "faith-reason" alignment was repeatedly debated as a two-term system (quite as St. Anselm's formula, when considered in itself, gives no indication of its place in a three-term system).

In an earlier draft I also considered how the "faith-reason" pair, while retaining its dyadic form, later becomes critically transformed in its *attitude*. For instance, in Schopenhauer's pessimism, "faith" becomes merely a blind universal craving (a *Wille* that might more accurately be translated as "sheer

restless meaningless drive"), while "reason" becomes the conversion of this subhuman metaphysical greed into *Vorstellungen* ("ideas" that are on the slope leading to the psychoanalyst's concept of "rationalization" or the political theorist's concept of "ideology").

For a critical variant of the three-term system, see Spinoza's *Ethics*, Book II, "On the Nature and Origin of the Mind," Proposition XL, Scholium 2. There the three stages are: (1) *opinio*, or *imaginatio*; (2) *ratio*; (3) *scientia intuitiva*.

An analogous problem figures in purely aesthetic theory. There can be the stress upon art as self-expression, or the stress upon art as communication (evocation, medium for affecting an audience). Most writers of my generation began in a period when self-expression was a slogan; but the stress upon communication gradually gained prominence, until now "communication" is almost a password in certain circles.

Accordingly, critics might choose to debate the issue in those terms. One group might stress self-expression as the essence of art, others might stress communication, others might compromise by proposing a judicious mixing of the two (such mixtures being conceived in accordance with either the notion that self-expression and communication reinforce each other or the notion that they act as a check upon each other, or that they do a bit of both). Or we might proceed by the addition of a third term, thus:

(1) Art begins in *self-expression*, spontaneous utterance, as with outcries, oaths, interjections.

(2) Such motives are matured by translation into the great complexities of language that owe their development to the use of language as a medium of *communication* (itself rooted in forms of practical coöperation).

(3) But the work of art moves *towards the transcending of both self-expression and communication*.

This third stage would come about in the following way:

The artist would choose themes that engrossed him personally ("self-expression"). He would develop them by the use of a public medium ("communication"). But in the course of perfecting his work, he encounters possibilities purely internal to the medium; and he may exploit these possibilities "to the end of the line," regardless of either self-expression or communication.

Joyce's later work is an example of this development. Few writers have paid greater attention than he to the public lore (the materials of communication). Yet he did not develop this material purely from the standpoint of its communicability, but rather from the standpoint of its ultimate possibilities (possibilities that might be more efficiently exploited if he deliberately rejected the standards we usually associate with communication). In following out such possibilities, he would presumably be answering a call (he would be "expressing himself" in a very full sense). Yet the resulting product would be *consummatory* in a way that could not be adequately confined to either of the first two stages, but would have something of both in being beyond both.

Thus the three theological stages involved in St. Anselm's formula would have as their secular, aesthetic analogues:

(1) *Fides*: self-expression.

(2) *Intellectus*: communication.

(3) *Contemplatio*: consummation.

## THOMAS H. CARTER:

### Rhetoric and Southern Landscapes

EUDORA WELTY: *The Bride of the Innisfallen*. Harcourt, Brace.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR: *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. Harcourt, Brace.

Even superficially, these two volumes seem to invite a joint consideration: both are composed of short stories published variously in magazines; both are written by Southern ladies of impressive talent. What really links them together, however, is their authors' firm, professional reliance on a highly developed, somewhat personalized use of rhetoric. In regard to matters of style, Miss Welty's book is the more dazzling. In most of her collection, in fact, the language pretty much *is* the story: the rich surface, tending more and more to assert its right to corporate existence, doesn't have any particular subject to which it can adhere. For this reason, almost all *The Bride of the Innisfallen* (which embraces many places, many people) is disappointing. Miss Welty's new stories are, of course, full of good things—mainly minor characters illuminated and permanently fixed by a single memorable gesture; the characteristically sharp, evocative descriptions—but their substance, with one or two exceptions, is trivial.

Since the first story, "No Place for You, My Love," establishes the tone for the collection, it may be well to take a hard look at it. At a luncheon in New Orleans, a man and woman (no special man or woman: they aren't even named) exchange bored glances. Strangers to each other and the city, they slip away for an afternoon drive in the bayou country, dance and eat at "Baba's Place," engage in a perfunctory kiss, and return chastely to New Orleans. Miss Welty invests these characters with a vague identity, most successfully in visual terms; we know enough of them to predict exactly how their excursion will turn out; but essentially the reader hasn't much to grasp. Miss Welty, with commendable restraint, refuses to inflate a casual incident with unearned significance; but dramatically, since it happens to nobody, it can have no meaning of its own—as the characters themselves seem aware. As the couple dance together, the woman remarks:

"I get to thinking this is what we get—what you and I deserve  
... And all the time, it's real. It's a real place, away off down  
here ..."

The lady has a point. In nearly all of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* (I would except a single story, "The Burning"), the place is far more real than anything that occurs, or the shadowy people to whom it occurs; it usurps, one feels continually, the vitality that ought to belong to the characters—who appear to have no inner, or even mental, life whatsoever. The following account of Baba's Place (in which the people are merely part of the general atmospheric effect) should serve to illustrate the nature of Miss Welty's virtues, as well as suggest with what, in a sense, the protagonists are competing:

The dog lay sleeping on in front of the raging juke box, his ribs working fast as a concertina's. At the side of the room a man with a cap on his white thatch was trying his best to open a side door, but it was stuck fast. . . . Moths as thick as ingots were trying to get in. The card players broke into shouts of derision, then joy, then tired derision among themselves; they might have been here all afternoon—they were the only ones who had not cleaned up and shaved. The original pair of little boys ran in once more, with the hyphenated bang. They got nickels this time, then were brushed away from the table like mosquitoes, and they rushed under the counter and on to the cauldron beyond, clinging to Baba's mother there. The evening was at the threshold.

Similar reservations must be made about the title story and "Going to Naples," both narratives of some length. What appears to be economy of technique turns out, instead, to be a poverty of incident and characterization; hence the over-emphasis on local color. Miss Welty, one suspects, has surrendered to the same kind of descriptive impressionism that tends, with increasing frequency, to vitiate the recent work of Elizabeth Bowen—the attempt, that is, to coerce a fine style, which is only sometimes facile, into carrying the whole burden of the fiction.

In *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, the stories finally begin to acquire something of a needed solidity when Miss Welty returns at last to what is more or less her home ground; I mean that vast literary region called the South. In "Kin," two girls—they are cousins, but one has been away—visit a country uncle dying at Mingo, the old family place "miles from anywhere." The old man, so ill his tongue must be moistened before he can speak (or protest), has been completely taken over by "Sister Anne," a rural connection whose habit is to hover vulture-like over the deaths of her relatives. Miss Welty renders her sharply in action; the dreadful woman has typically moved the nearly dead uncle into a plunder room while she has leased out the front parlor to an itinerant photographer—who has promised, in return, to take a free picture of her. As they leave, one of the girls says: "Mama's too nice to say it about Sister Anne, but I will. . . . She's common." Miss Welty catches the complex relationship of these characters to one another—the city to the country cousin, Mamma to Sister Anne, the fierce dying old man to the world—and conveys them exactly and affectionately; her acute perceptivity is grounded, one judges, in both observation and familiarity.

The best piece in the book, certainly the only one that represents Miss Welty at anything like her best, is a brief Civil War episode, "The Burning," which exhibits admirably her gift for the improbable but (in her hands) believable event. Two Southern ladies are sitting in the parlor of their fine house, which Sherman has ordered burned, when two Union soldiers and a horse enter the front door:

It was a towering, sweating, grimacing, uneasy white horse. It had brought in two soldiers with red eyes and clawed, mosquito-racked faces—one a rider, hang-jawed and head-hanging, and the other walking by its side, all breathing in here now loud as trumpets.

Using a shifting point of view (which remains, I should say, actually the author's), the story moves quickly to an hallucinated but inevitable conclusion.



The house is burned, the two sisters and a slave girl stroll through the ashes of nearby Jackson, the sisters—shockingly enough—hang themselves; and the little slave returns to the ruined house to salvage a few items and then go down river. Before leaving, however, she pokes in the ruins and, finding a cracked mirror, thoughtlessly apes her dead mistresses before it; in so doing, she not only recreates vividly the image of what has been destroyed, but adds a new dimension to the action. Miss Welty, this once, subordinates her style to her story, judges the precise weight of her incident, and gives it, in fictional terms, exactly what it is worth.

The selections in Miss Welty's book seem altogether occasional (which is, in itself, not necessarily a bad thing). Whatever unity the book has, it owes to the presiding and, in this case, wavering sensibility. Flannery O'Connor's first collection of short stories, on the other hand, demonstrates a high degree of thematic integrity; it is a tough-minded, solidly realized piece of work. That is why it is possible to speak of her book as an entity; Miss Welty's must be taken in pieces.

It is true that Miss O'Connor does establish a certain incidental unity of landscape—which happens, I take it, to be mostly Georgia farm country; and certain types of people, generally solitary women determined to hold on to their land, constantly recur. But such unity, of the kind that Mr. Shelby Foote sets out methodically to cultivate, is at best external. In Miss O'Connor's case, it is scarcely systematic; and one imagines that it is primarily a matter of expediency, of perhaps the availability of experience.

What distinguishes Miss O'Connor's collection from *The Bride of the Innisfallen* is that, in any rigorous sense, most of Miss Welty's stories are actually nothing more than artfully extended sketches. There is nothing blurred about *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*; it is held together, probably unintentionally, by a consistent internal coherence. Miss O'Connor, with no trace of self-consciousness, writes with a firm moral awareness that, serving as a steady point of reference, continually shapes and informs her fictions. Her stories are not didactic, because her moral sense coincides with her dramatic sensibility: there is nothing explicit about them, or moralizing; but she is a fabulist just the same.

The title—*A Good Man Is Hard to Find*—states quite literally the burden of the book. All Miss O'Connor's characters tend to be fragmentary, incomplete persons suffering from a frustrated or perverted religious impulse; they are trying either to go somewhere, to escape, or doggedly to retain what they have. ("A Circle in the Fire," for instance, details even the attempt of three boys to recapture what is for them a kind of Paradise; when they find it can't be done, they seek to burn it.) The characters seldom recognize the source of their motivation, of course; and Miss O'Connor, who doesn't employ the device of a central, ordering intelligence, refuses to spell it out. The meaning of most of her stories needs to be approached on two levels: that of the events and characters rendered, and that of the symbolic texture of the language.

The title story, a *tour de force* of the grotesque, operates on the level of satire: Miss O'Connor reduces her characters largely to a single dimension. A family of dreary people encounter and are subsequently murdered by an insane criminal who elects to call himself The Misfit. Within this unpromising framework, Miss O'Connor achieves a delicate balance between gratuitous tabloid brutality and allegory; the members of the family eventually slaughtered are

presented with such naturalistic skill as to make the reader a little uncomfortable—which may be what Miss O'Connor has in mind. Just before she is shot, the old grandmother finds herself saying, "Jesus, Jesus," meaning, Jesus will help you—she is trying to "convert" The Misfit to save her own neck—"but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing." The Misfit, like the hero of Miss O'Connor's earlier novel, *Wise Blood*, demands a religious absolute: if he can't have God on his own terms, then he must somehow destroy Him.

Miss O'Connor's language undoubtedly owes something to her section of Georgia; but one judges that it properly owes most to Miss O'Connor. Her style is lucid, economical, and close to actual speech; it is, as it ought to be, an instrument. With some frequency, Miss O'Connor employs traditional religious imagery; but more often her symbols are naturalistically self-contained, defined by and operating within the story. Her rhetorical effects are carefully prepared for. In "The Displaced Person," for example, one Mrs. Shortley must receive the erroneous impression, which subconsciously she desires, that she is an agent of God. Early in the story, Miss O'Connor describes a peacock:

"So beautiful," the priest said. "A tail full of suns," and he crept forward on tiptoe and looked down on the bird's back where the polished green and gold design began. The peacock stood still as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all.

Twenty pages later this description is incorporated into the texture of Mrs. Shortley's mountain-top vision:

Suddenly while she watched, the sky folded back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage and a gigantic figure stood facing her. It was the color of the sun in the early afternoon, white gold. It was of no definite shape but there were fiery wheels with fierce dark eyes in them, spinning rapidly all around it. . . . She shut her eyes in order to look at it and it turned blood-red and the wheels turned white. A voice, very resonant, said the one word, "Prophecy."

Because the reader already knows that Mrs. Shortley suffers from a bad heart, and that her vision could have resulted from the effort of climbing the hill, he anticipates—almost—the stroke that constitutes Mrs. Shortley's ironic apotheosis:

. . . her huge body rolled back still against the seat and her eyes like blue-painted glass, [she] seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country.

One of Miss O'Connor's most compact stories, "Good Country People," is in its way as surely predicated on the fact of human damnation as Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand." Its chief character is an embittered, aging woman who, though she has a Ph.D., has returned home to live on her mother's farm; her given name is Joy, but she has legally changed it to the ugly Hulga to complement the childhood loss of a leg. As part of her policy of thorough-going nihilism—as well as to confound her simple mother—she attempts to seduce a young drummer peddling Bibles; this man, whom her mother has just called one of the

"good country people," manages to steal her wooden leg and leave her stranded in a hay loft. The unexpected climax has the effect of a chilling revelation:

"And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using her name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight.

*A Good Man Is Hard to Find* does not really suggest, as it may seem, that Miss O'Connor is negative or despairing; the disciplined exuberance of her tone, if nothing else, would contradict that; and her fine humor reflects on her characters a fair share of saving grace. A good man, in the root meaning she attaches to the phrase, must always be hard to find; but one feels sure—which is what counts—that Miss O'Connor would recognize him at once. Meanwhile, with her second book now in hand, it seems unduly conservative to speak of her as "promising"—though her future work promises much. What she has already accomplished seems an achievement of high order. In an era of pseudo-Hemingways, Faulkners and Warrens, there is no one quite like her.

## STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN:

### Ballads for Americans

*The Ballad Book* (MacEdward Leach, editor). Harper.

The enormous popularity of dubious American folksong in our time has never really affected the scholarly study of the ballad, which goes on classifying its Scandinavian analogues and disputing its 18th-century emendations oblivious to the planging of guitars all around. MacEdward Leach's anthology *The Ballad Book* is the first real attempt to bring the two groups together, to extend Professor Francis James Child's generally accepted corpus to include American "ballads" like "The Jam on Gerry's Rock" and "Betsy from Pike," and, presumably, to supplant Kittredge's one-volume edition of Child in classroom use with this Anglo-American medley.

My disagreement with Professor Leach regarding the origin, structure, and function of the ballad is fundamental, and a great many general statements made in his introduction seem to me demonstrably untrue on the evidence of his own texts. The communal theories of ballad origin from which my own views derive are in turn dismissed in his introduction as the fallacies of 19th-century scholars "led astray by lack of precise definition." At least three statements in Leach's introduction, however, I can heartily concur with and I consider points that badly need making: that the ballad is not the wild and irregular verse form the Romantic movement took it to be, but is rigidly conventional and regular *in terms of its tune*; that "by and large the ballad tends to degenerate" in folk transmission, not polish gemlike; and that the finest American ballads, with "a spontaneity and a seriousness that the others lack," are the Negro ballads, such as "John Henry," "Frankie and Albert," and "Stagolee."

Leach prints about 180 of the 305 ballads to which Child gave numbers,

some in as many as four variants, with an emphasis on recently collected American texts and Danish analogues in English translation. These are intelligently selected, and except for a few copying errors (stanza 19 of "Tam Lin," stanza 14 of "The Twa Magicians") they are carefully edited. All but a handful have some headnotes, in the scholar's moderate and sensible tone, even where they hit obvious absurdity, such as Phillips Barry's theory that Lamkin was a leper (Leach calls it "a rather wide speculation"). The editor tends to have a good eye, or ear, for "the nice literary hand of the 18th-century poet," and to know a broadside when he sees one. He includes at least one good early text unknown to Child (of "The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry"), and adds English broadsides and a few English songs Child did not consider ballads if he knew them ("The Bitter Withy," "The Corpus Christi Carol," and "The Bold Fisherman"), where the weight of later opinion would tend to agree with Leach. For the most part, however, his additions are "American ballads by origin or adoption" and American variants of Child ballads.

Leach includes no music (except for two examples in the introduction), arguing that ballad tunes cannot be indicated accurately, and then admitting delicately that problems of space and expense may have had something to do with his decision. Despite his view that "ballad structure cannot be studied accurately without constant reference to the music," he does not even indicate (as Child did and almost everyone since has) where the tunes may be found. An appended "Selected List of Ballad Recordings" may have been assumed to make up for this lack, but it is so haphazard, incomplete, inadequate and uncritical as to be just about useless. The list includes recordings of songs not found in the book, and distinguishes neither short-play records from long-play nor out-of-print records from those obtainable. Its only critical feature, an asterisk to indicate recordings "especially recommended for authenticity," seems rather arbitrary, awarding its cachet to several notorious Greenwich Village hillbillies and refusing it to, say, a Finnish recording (not authentic as what, Finnish?).

To those of us who believe that the ballad is a very ancient anonymous communal work originating in ritual drama, that it derives from the sung text of an acted sacrificial rite, and that its making is a closed account, Leach's insistence on individual modern authorship seems pointless. It seems to leave him no distinction at all between ballads and broadsides, other than the author's talent, and catches him inevitably in the contradiction between such statements as "the originators of the traditional ballads had no literary pretensions, no literary sophistication," and "One needs only to read 'Mary Hamilton' or 'The Unquiet Grave' or 'Child Waters' or 'Sir Patrick Spens' to know that poets and skillful artificers were behind these ballads." In either case of modern authorship, what can he mean by saying that "Sir Lionel" is "a tale that goes back perhaps to the cult of the Great Mother"?

Leach believes that many, if not most, ballads are historical ("a stirring local event occurs in a community"), but he keeps running into the absence of history: "The name of Sir Patrick Spens appears in no Scottish or English records," "Percy, said to be killed at 'Chevy Chase,' was in command of the English" fourteen years later. His insistence that the structure or form of ballads is realistic and journalistic, like the "modern newspaper story," rather than mythic and dramatic, leaves him unable to see the obvious miming in such ballads as "The Maid Freed from the Gallows," which he believes *developed*

into children's game, drama, and *cante-fable* in America, and leads him flatly to base the Robin Hood dramas on the ballads, rather than the reverse. Leach's sense of the ballad's function as story-telling and repertorial, rather than magical and symbolic, leaves him constantly puzzled over what seem to him to be mysterious accidents of transmission: "The Lass of Roch Royal" is "rather rare in spite of the fact that it is a moving and tragic story"; of "The Bonny Earl of Murray," "One wonders why all the dramatic story was passed by, by the ballad maker."

Insofar as the ballad is ritual in origin, dramatic in structure, and magical in function, its true affinities are not with tearjerking English broadsides like "Young Edwin in the Lowlands Low," which Leach aspires to add to the canon, but with ancient English ritual and totemic songs like "The Cutty Wren" and "The Derby Ram," which he ignores; or with "The Lyke-Wake Dirge," which he prints in the introduction only to show the difference between its lyric character and the narrative structure of "Willie's Lyke-Wake."

Fundamentally, our judgment of Leach's ambitious attempt to revise Child's corpus must hinge on the problem of the ballad in America, and here if we do not watch our steps we are apt to sink out of sight in waving fields of corn. Variants of about a hundred Child ballads have been recovered in this country through assiduous labor, and most of them have ill repaid that labor. There are occasional touches of life and vigor, as in a Tennessee "Johnnie Scot" in which wicked King Edward asks:

"Is this young Johnny Scot?" he said,  
 "Or old Johnny Scotling's son,  
 Or is it the young bastard-getter  
 From Scotland has come in?"

Most of the American texts are corrupt and wretched beyond belief. A Vermont "Elfin Knight" has for refrain:

Fluma luma lokey sloomy  
 From a teaslum tasalum templum  
 Fluma luma lokey sloomy.

A North Carolina "Earl Brand" turns into jumble:

"My father is of a regis king,  
 My mother's a quaker's queen."

American folk etymology seems to be so half-hearted, so disinclined to push until *some* meaning is obtained, that William's foreboding dream of slaughtered swine in "Fair Margaret and Sweet William" becomes in a Kentucky variant: "I dreamed last night of young science in my room." A Nova Scotia refrain for "The Gypsy Laddie" goes:

Red Lady dingo, dingo day,  
 Red Lady dingo, dingo Daisy;  
 Red Lady dingo, dingo day,  
 She's away with the Gypsy Daisy.

Where the American Child ballads are hopelessly deteriorated, corrupt, and meaningless in good part, the American originals are mostly (with the excep-

tion of the Negro songs) the inept work of broadside writers and hacks, fairly described by Leach as "stiff with literary starch," or "insipid and cheaply sentimental." In a few cases (such as "Young Charlotte," written by Seba Smith) we know the poet's name and have the printed text before it went into folk dissemination. The American ballad problem is actually not a problem of origins at all, but one of folk transmission, the sentimentalization and deterioration of the Child ballads and the downward migration of the products of broadside writer or hack poet. If "Jesse James," "Casey Jones," and their like are narrative songs of considerable value, we need not call them folk ballads to appreciate them, and can fairly recognize that they are the compositions of anonymous song writers of ability, and that folk-singing no more entitles them to be folk products than it does "My Old Kentucky Home" or "Sweet Adeline."

The true English and Scottish popular ballads are something else again. At their best<sup>1</sup> they are an unrivaled tragic poetry with the sort of dramatic tension we are most familiar with in Attic drama. The shock we experience in Euripides' *Medea* when the infanticidal witch appears above the stage in a chariot drawn by dragons, in place of the *theophany* we have been expecting, is the same sort of shock (deeply disturbing and just on the edge of the ludicrous) we get at the ending of "Gil Brenton":

Now or a month was come an gone,  
This lady bare a bonny young son.

An it was well written on his breast-bane,  
"Gil Brenton is my father's name."

The pity and terror of Oedipus' recognition of his crimes in Sophocles' play is the same pity and terror we experience in the last line of "Edward," and we may even find it in the fourth stanza of "Lizie Wan," when Lizie replies flatly to her brother's question about her health:

"I ail, I ail, dear brither," she said,  
"And I'll tell you a reason for why;  
There is a child between my twa sides,  
Between you, dear billy, and I."

When the innocent May Catheren will not burn in the bonfire at the end of "Young Hunting," and she is taken out and the false lady who slew Hunting is substituted, all we need be told is that the fire:

O it took upon her cheek, her cheek,  
An it took upon her chin,  
An it took on her fair body,  
She burnt like hoky-gren.

<sup>1</sup>In an article "The Language of Scottish Poetry," in *The Kenyon Review*, Winter 1954, I suggested as candidates toward a classic tradition: "The Wife of Usher's Well," "The Twa Sisters," "Edward," "Clerk Saunders," "Sir Patrick Spens," "Johnie Cock," "Mary Hamilton," "The Bonny Earl of Murray," "Child Maurice," "Young Waters," "The Baron of Brackley," "Lamkin," "The Cruel Mother," "The Twa Corbies," and "The Daemon Lover."

Leach's glossary defines "hoky-gren" as "blanketed fire" (the term is somewhat disputed), but what the line says, in contrast to "her fair body," is definable in no glossary. Richard Blackmur says of Yeats' "A Deep-Sworn Vow" that "the words accumulate by the simplest means an intolerable excitement," and there could be no better description of the poetic language of the ballads, as we get it, say, in "The Hunting of the Cheviot":

For Wetharryngton my harte was wo,  
that euer he slayne shulde be;  
For when both his leggis wear bewyne in to,  
yet he knyled and fought on hys kny.

It is this quality in the ballads, the language of purest incantation, that no poet has ever been able to get in his ballad imitations (with Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" perhaps coming closest). It comes into the ballad from myth and rite, and if Yeats achieves it in poems like "A Deep-Sworn Vow," as a hymn in a private redemptive religion, it is wholly lacking in such of his imitation ballads as "Father Gilligan."

The quality of the ballads that our poets *have* been able to achieve (I think of such poems as John Crowe Ransom's "Captain Carpenter") is their irony, the underplayed contrast in "Lord Ingram and Chiel Wyet":

Lord Ingram wood her Lady Maisery  
Into her father's ha;  
Chiel Wyet wood her Lady Maisery  
Amang the sheets so sma.

It is the irony of Musgrave in "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard," caught in bed with the lady by Lord Barnard and on the edge of his doom, replying to Barnard's "Doest thou find my lady sweet?":

"I find her sweet," quoth Little Musgrave,  
"The more 't is to my paine;  
I would gladly give three hundred pounds  
That I were on yonder plaine."

Perhaps the only profitable relationships of our poetry to our folk tradition (and the great English and Scottish ballads *are* our folk tradition, not "The Little Mohee") are ironic ones, are in fact gestures emphasizing our distance from a ballad folk, like the Ransom poem.

I once believed that the modern poet could draw on the rhythms of ballads and blues with Auden, on the flatness of folk speech with Fearing, and I can recall writing a pronunciamento in college to that effect. I am now somewhat more sceptical. It may be that all our poets can learn from these great ballads is how to write something very different, another kind of incantation, more like negative magic, drenched with irony. Empson's "Missing Dates," that ominous, lilting anticipation of radioactive fall-out, is the sort of ironic building-at-some-distance-from-the-ruins-of-balladry that I mean. Perhaps what MacEdward Leach's ambitious *Ballad Book* can do best is remind us that America is not really what the chauvinists would have her, the heir of all the ages, but only a late colony of Europe trying very hard to lay the foundations for a native culture.

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